Ontario

Ministry of Education

School Councils

A Guide for Members

2001

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Welcome

to your school council!

As a school council member, you can help your council discover new and exciting ways to contribute to the education of students in your school. Education is a partnership involving parents, students, teachers, principals, school boards, government, and the community. Your involvement in the council gives you the opportunity to strengthen that partnership, and to be part of a dedicated team working to ensure a high quality of education and an accountable education system for the children of Ontario. Your participation can make a difference!

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Cette publication est également offerte en français sous le titre suivant : *Conseils d'école : Un guide à l'intention des membres.*

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education website at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca.

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School Councils: Making a Difference

School councils play a vital role in the education system in Ontario. They provide a forum through which parents[1] and other members of school communities can contribute to improving student achievement and school performance.

In 2000-2001, the Ontario government took significant steps to ensure that parents, through their school councils, would have greater influence in their children's education. New regulations were created that confirm the advisory role of school councils and clearly state that their purpose is to *improve student achievement and enhance the accountability of the education system to parents.*

School councils are now able to make recommendations to their principals and school boards[2] on *any* matter. Principals and school boards, in turn, must consult with school councils on a variety of matters that affect student learning. They must also consider recommendations made by school councils and report back to the councils on how they plan to act on their advice.

Getting Involved

Parental involvement in a child's education has been shown to have a significant effect on his or her achievement. In its publication *School Improvement Planning: A Handbook for Principals, Teachers, and School Councils* (November 2000), the Education Improvement Commission (EIC) describes the results of research on parental involvement this way:

> Parental involvement is one of the most significant factors contributing to a child's success in school. When parents are involved in their children's education, the level of student achievement increases. Students attend school more regularly, they complete more homework in a consistent manner, and demonstrate more positive attitudes towards school. They are also more likely to complete high school.[3]

The partnership of school and community representatives on a school council helps to build mutual understanding and interaction between a school and its community, resulting in benefits for both. By giving information to parents and community representatives, getting feedback from them, and presenting their views to the school and the school board, a school council involves the community in the discussion of educational issues and helps the school identify and respond to the educational needs of the community.

Membership on a school council also benefits the individuals involved. The personal advantages of becoming a school council member include:

- being an important partner in the education system, whose views are valued;
- contributing to the shared goal of improving student achievement;
- having a vehicle through which to express opinions;

- being able to keep informed about what is happening at the school and the board, and at the provincial level of education.

Participating on the school council will be a rewarding experience for all those who value the opportunity to make a difference in their children's education.

Using This Guide

This comprehensive guide has been developed to help school council members fulfil their mandate in the most effective and efficient ways. It explains the new regulations and outlines what they mean for school councils, principals, and school boards. It explains in detail the roles and responsibilities of each partner, and outlines the areas in which school boards and principals are required to consult with school councils.

Suggestions are provided to help school councils set goals and priorities. Practical tips are also offered to help them prepare for and run elections and meetings, establish bylaws, and communicate effectively with their school communities. The guide also provides ideas and examples from school councils across the province that can be adapted to meet each school council's needs.

School council members should use this guide as a resource. A detailed table of contents, along with a list of sample forms, checklists, reports, and other useful items, has been included to allow readers to readily locate the particular subject or piece of information that they may need. In addition, cross-references to related sections are provided throughout the guide to help readers access the information they need.

This guide replaces the *School Council Handbook, 1996*.

Notes

1. In this guide, the term *parents* refers to parent(s) and guardian(s).
2. In this guide, the terms *school board* and *board* refer to district school boards and school authorities.
3. The EIC cites the following sources for this information: Joyce L. Epstein, L. Coates, K.C. Salinas, M.G. Sanders, and B.S. Simon, *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 1997); and Joyce L. Epstein, *School and Family Partnerships: Report 6* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, 1992).

A Short History of School Councils in Ontario

Our schools have inherited a rich tradition of parental and community involvement in education, including the unique experiences and perspectives of the Catholic and French educational communities. This tradition forms the foundation for continuing community participation in education.

Recognizing the Need for School Councils

In February 1994, the government asked the newly established Ontario Parent Council (OPC) to investigate the possible establishment of local school parent councils across Ontario. As part of its research, the OPC examined how parents were involved in their schools and how they would like to be involved. The OPC's final report[1] recommended that parent participation at the local school level be established through an amendment to the Education Act. The OPC also recommended that a school parent council be required for every school to "ensure equity of access and consistency of approach for parents across Ontario".

In its January 1995 report, *For the Love of Learning*,[2] the Royal Commission on Learning acknowledged the importance of parental involvement in Ontario schools and recommended the establishment of "school community councils". Recognizing that Ontario has a long-standing tradition of parental involvement in schools, this recommendation called for a different kind of model for such involvement. Similar initiatives, including establishing mandatory school councils, were taking place in other provinces across Canada.

First Steps in Establishing School Councils

In response to the commission's recommendation, in April 1995, the Ministry of Education and Training issued Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 122: School Board Policies on School Councils, which required boards to develop policies that would establish school councils in the schools operated by them by June 1996. This new PPM outlined the minimum requirements for the composition and functioning of school councils. In 1997, the Education Quality Improvement Act mandated that there be school councils in all publicly funded schools in Ontario. By mid-1997, most school boards had completed their school council implementation plans, and school councils were forging their own way. However, not all school councils were equally positioned in terms of their experience, advancement, work, and the type of support they received from their boards. PPM No. 122 provided good direction in the early stages; however, frustrations were beginning to surface from a need for more specific guidelines and clearer accountability measures. It was time for an assessment of the roles and future directions of school councils in Ontario.

Strengthening the Role of School Councils

In 1998, Minister of Education and Training Dave Johnson asked the former Education Improvement Commission (EIC) to review the future role of school councils and to advise on ways to make them stronger and more effective. In preparing its report,

the EIC reviewed the work of previous commissions, conducted research on the work of school councils in other places, and consulted education organizations and the public. The vast majority of people who responded during the commission's consultations were parents. The EIC's report, *The Road Ahead – III: A Report on the Role of School Councils*, proposed an even more meaningful role for school councils, which further encouraged the involvement of parents in their children's education.

The EIC found that most parents wanted their school councils to remain advisory bodies, but felt that their advice was not always considered. Parents wanted to have meaningful input and an ability to influence decisions that would affect their children and their local schools. While there were some excellent examples of close working relationships between school councils, schools, and boards, the EIC noted the need to develop consistent expectations for school councils across the province.

Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities

In December 1999, Minister of Education Janet Ecker asked her parliamentary assistant, David Young, to meet with school council representatives across Ontario to find out what they needed to help their school councils better understand their role and become more effective. In early 2000, the Minister's parliamentary assistant met with more than 700 parents in 14 locations across the province and attended 27 meetings with provincial organizations involved in education. More than 1,500 submissions were received. A discussion document, "School Councils – A Background Paper", was distributed to school councils and posted on the ministry website.

The feedback received confirmed that parents wanted their voices to be heard through school councils. But they also wanted the advisory role of school councils to be clear and consistent, province-wide. At the same time, they wanted school boards and principals to be clear about their roles and responsibilities in dealing with school councils.

As a result of the advice and recommendations received from parents and others, in December 2000, Minister Ecker released Ontario Regulation 612/00, which confirms the advisory role of school councils and clearly states that their purpose is to improve student achievement and enhance the accountability of the education system to parents. This regulation also clarifies the role of school councils and establishes their right to express their views on any issues that are important to them.

Ontario Regulation 613/00, also released in December 2000, is an amendment to Regulation 298 (Operation of Schools, General). It sets out the duties of principals regarding school councils, in addition to the duties already described in Regulation 298. All references to Regulation 298 in this guide include the amendments contained in Ontario Regulation 613/00.

Both regulations, released under the Education Act, require school boards and principals to solicit views from school councils and report back to school councils on any advice received. They also ensure that all school boards and school principals across the province consult with and respond to their school councils in a consistent manner.

By strengthening school councils and helping them to operate more effectively, school councils will be able to better influence decisions affecting both students' education and schools themselves. The Ministry of Education is committed to supporting the long-term development of school councils and will continually seek ways to help school councils be an effective voice for parents.

Notes

1. Ontario Parent Council, *Report on the Establishment of School Parent Councils in Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Parent Council, July 1994).
2. Royal Commission on Learning, *For the Love of Learning: Report of the Royal Commission on Learning* (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1995).

The Regulations Governing School Councils

What Do the Regulations Mean for School Councils?

To help school councils with their work of influencing decisions that affect students' education and the effective operation of schools, Ontario Regulation 612/00 and Regulation 298 together address three key areas: the purpose of school councils, operational matters, and the obligation of boards and principals to consult with school councils. Regulation 612/00 confirms that school councils are advisory bodies and clearly states that they may make recommendations to their principals or school boards on any matter. The regulations require boards and principals to report back on how the recommendations have been taken into account.

Consultation With Parents

Regulation 612/00 clearly directs school councils to consult with parents of students enrolled in the school about matters under consideration by the council. It is therefore expected that any advice provided to the school principal or school board will be based on the general views of the school community and the best interests of all students in the school. Each school council is accountable to the school community it represents. (See "Consultation With Parents by School Councils", in Section 4: Consultation, for additional information.)

School Council Membership

The membership of a school council changes from year to year. Each year, potential new council members will be recruited for election, elections will take place, and the newly elected members will be oriented to their tasks. School councils may want to develop some strategies that address the need for continuity and that ensure that the history, experience, and expertise of previous councils remain with the council. These strategies may include developing a good orientation package for distribution to new members and keeping quality records that include meeting minutes, policies, bylaws, and annual reports.

Ideally, the membership of the school council will reflect the diversity of its school community. Parents and guardians must form the majority of members on the council. All members may bring before the council the issues and concerns of the groups that they represent and provide links to those groups.

Ontario Regulation 612/00 establishes that a school council will consist of the following members:

- a majority of parents, as specified in a bylaw of the school council or by the board if such a bylaw does not exist[1]
- the principal or vice-principal of the school (the principal may delegate membership responsibility to the vice-principal)
- one teacher employed in the school, other than the principal or vice-principal
- one non-teaching employee of the school
- one student, in the case of secondary schools (optional for elementary schools)
- one or more community representatives appointed by the elected council
- one person appointed by an association that is a member of the Ontario Federation of Home and

School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, or Parents Partenaires en Éducation, if the association is represented at the school

Thus, the regulation confirms that the school council must include a majority of parents, the principal, and at least one student, and legislates a few new requirements:

- Rather than allowing for a minimum number of teachers and non-teaching staff as members, it establishes a fixed number (one teacher member and one non-teaching staff member).
- It identifies who can and cannot be elected to the parent and non-parent categories.
- It extends the composition of the council by adding representation from a recognized provincial parents' association, if the association is represented in the school.

Membership Requirements

Parent members. A parent member is one who is a parent or guardian of a child enrolled in the school. (In a school that is established for adults, "parent members" of the school council will be the adult students themselves.) The board or the council must ensure that parent members form the majority of the school council membership. The regulation sets no maximum number of parents on a council; however, the number of parent members on the council should be stipulated by a school council bylaw or by the board if no bylaw exists. A chair or co-chair of a school council must be a parent member of the council.

Board employees and trustees. A board employee who works at the school his or her child attends is *not* eligible to serve as a parent member on the council. This provision recognizes that board employees have avenues other than school councils (e.g., staff meetings) through which to influence the decisions that the principal might make at their schools, whereas parents who do not work at the school their children attend have no occasion to discuss and have input into matters affecting the school. A board employee who works at the school his or her child attends may, however, be elected as either the teaching or non-teaching staff representative.

Board employees who do not work at the school their children attend may be elected as parent members as long as they notify the other parents that they are employed by the school board prior to their election. The requirement to disclose their affiliation with a board will reduce the potential for conflict of interest.

An employee of the board that established a school council cannot serve as the chair or a co-chair of the council.

School board trustees are not eligible to be members of councils of schools within their boards.

Community representative(s). The council must appoint at least one community representative, who cannot be an employee at the school. If the community representative is employed elsewhere by the board, he or she must inform other council members of his or her employment prior to appointment.

Student representative(s). In a school with one or more secondary grades, at least one student member, appointed by the student council, must serve on the school council. If there is no student council, the student is to be elected by the student body. In an elementary school, the principal must consult with the school council to determine if the council should include a student. If the decision is made that a student should be on the council, then the principal can appoint the student. (The principal may consider advice received from students regarding the appointment of a student.) The student representative on the school council of either a secondary or an elementary school must be a student enrolled in the school.

Although the regulation requires the inclusion of only one student member on the school council, school council bylaws may provide for additional student representation (provided that parent members still form a majority). As well, students can be included in the committee work of a school council.

subject to school council bylaws. Furthermore, since council meetings must be open to the public, interested students are welcome to attend.

School staff representatives. Any teacher in the school is eligible to seek election for the one teacher position on the school council. He or she is to be elected by other teachers in the school. The teacher position cannot be filled by a principal or vice-principal.

Any member of the non-teaching staff in the school is eligible to seek election for the one non-teaching staff position on the school council. He or she is to be elected by other non-teaching staff members in the school. A non-teaching staff member is anyone employed at the school who does not have teaching duties, such as a secretary, an educational assistant, a library technician, a member of the custodial staff, or a lunchtime or hallway monitor. Parents working in such a capacity in the school that their children attend may consider running for the position of non-teaching staff representative if they wish to serve on the school council.

Elections and Term of Office

Ontario Regulation 612/00 also addresses the term of office of school council members and the need for elections to be held annually, within the first thirty calendar days of the start of the school year. *Elections must be held within this timeframe.* These changes ensure that any parent who is interested in the school council election process or in participating as a member on the school council has the opportunity to do so.

Elections are held at the beginning of the school year to ensure that even parents who are new to the school community, such as those with children just entering Junior or Senior Kindergarten, or those with children just entering secondary school, will be able to participate in the election of their representatives on the school council. This provision also gives them the opportunity to be considered for election as parent members of their school councils.

The regulation has changed the term of office to a one-year term. This enables members to consider, on an ongoing basis, their involvement on their school councils. Should they find a change in their personal situations or circumstances, they may find that they are no longer able to continue with the commitment they made. The one-year term also allows parents to make decisions on a regular basis about how their interests and priorities are represented at the school. It is important to note, however, that the regulation does not restrict the number of times that a member can be re-elected.

Remuneration

School council members will not be paid for their work on a school council. However, each board, in consultation with the school council, must develop reimbursement policies regarding the expenses of school council members incurred as part of school council business.

Incorporation

Regulation 612/00 prohibits school councils from being incorporated. A school council already belongs to a corporation, that being the district school board that established the council. School councils are advisory groups to their principals or to their boards; they have been established to provide one way for parents to express opinions about how to improve student achievement and to ensure that parents can actively participate in the education of their children at the local level. This mandate does not require any additional legal status.

Fund-raising

Some school councils may decide to include fund-raising as one of their priorities. Fund-raising activities may be conducted as long as they are in accordance with board policies and guidelines and the funds raised are to be used for a purpose approved by the board. A school council may find that it is unable to continue a fund-raising activity in which it was previously involved, as the funds raised are not used for a purpose approved by the board. Similarly, a school council may find that it must change the way in which it fund-raises for an approved purpose to comply with board policies and guidelines.

Section 19(1)(1)(iv) of Regulation 612/00 requires that boards solicit school councils' views when developing policies or guidelines regarding fund-raising. Ultimately, if school councils decide that they would like to continue with certain fund-raising projects, they must work with their boards to develop policies or guidelines that permit the fund-raising and the use of funds for particular purposes.

School councils should be aware that, because the school board is a corporate entity and the school is not, any funds raised by the school council (and any assets purchased with those funds) belong, legally, to the board. The board may have policies specifying that the money raised by the council (and any assets purchased by the council) will remain with the school. However, such policies are not legally binding in the event that the school is closed.

All fund-raising activities conducted by the school council must be included in the annual report prepared by the school council. (See Section 10: Accountability.)

School Councils and the Ministry of Education

As part of its accountability to parents, the ministry will report annually to school councils on education in the province. In addition to this, the ministry may make other reports to school councils and provide information about their roles and responsibilities.

Collection of data on school council members. During the government's consultations with school councils, many school council members indicated that they would like to receive materials and information directly from the ministry rather than through their schools. As a result, under Regulation 612/00, the Ministry of Education may now request that school council members provide their names, mailing addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses should they want to receive directly any information related to the role of the council or to education in general. The provision of this information is voluntary on the part of school council members. Members may be assured that information gathered in this way is used only for the purposes of consulting and communicating directly with school council members. The ministry may, however, share this information with the Ontario Parent Council, which will also use the data only to consult and communicate directly with school council members.

What Do the Regulations Mean for Principals?

Supporting and Promoting School Councils

School principals play a unique and important role in the success of every school. The principal's involvement and interaction with the school council are key to the council's success. As a member of the school council and leader of the school community, the principal can provide the guidance and support necessary to help the council achieve its goals and be an effective voice for parents. According to the regulations, principals are to consult with their school councils, and school councils may provide advice on any matter to their principals or school boards.

Specifically, the objectives of the regulations are to strengthen the advisory role of school councils, set consistent expectations, and make the education system more accountable to parents. To ensure that parents' voices are heard through their school councils, the regulations clearly require that principals (and school boards) support their school councils. The regulations also clarify the roles and responsibilities of principals in working with their school councils.

It is important that principals demonstrate a collaborative and supportive approach to working with their school councils. Strong communication between principals and their councils is essential to successful school councils. It is also essential that principals and the chairs or co-chairs of their councils find an effective method of working together outside of regular meetings.

Each principal must find a style that is appropriate to his or her school community, whether the school is large or small, urban or rural, elementary or secondary. Where a principal develops a strong relationship with the school council, parents are more likely

to become involved in the school community, and this in turn will have a strong impact on the overall effectiveness of the school. Several communication tips are provided in Section 9: Communication.

The following section provides some explanation of the specific areas of the regulations that principals must be aware of as they promote and support their school councils.

Amendments to the Duties of Principals

The duties of school principals to support their school councils were originally outlined in Policy/ Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 122. Although in many cases, principals and school councils were working well together and school councils were being consulted on a range of issues by their principals, Ontario Regulation 613/00, an amendment to Regulation 298, enhances this relationship by clearly outlining the principal's role and responsibilities in terms of the school council.

Some Important Roles Played by the Principal

Acting as an important source of information. The principal is perhaps the key source of information for the school council. He or she is the council's best link to finding out about the Education Act and its regulations, ministry directives, laws, school policies, board policies, the school profile, school improvement plans, and other new initiatives at the school and at the board level. By sharing knowledge and acting as a resource, the principal is able to provide the school council with the information required to be effective. Principals should be prepared to answer questions and volunteer information on any matter being discussed by their councils. The better informed a council is, the better it will be able to provide the principal with good advice and contribute to the effective operation of the school.

Receiving and responding to school council recommendations. School council members have many and diverse interests, and may make recommendations on any matter. In addition to the mandatory areas of consultation, other examples of areas that might be considered by the school council include the scheduling of school special events and school policies regarding field trips. (A more complete list is included in Section 4: Consultation.) Good principals have always taken the recommendations made by school councils into account when making decisions; however, according to Regulation 298, principals are now required to report back on the actions taken or not taken in response to school council recommendations. Although to take action or not is still the principal's decision, the principal must provide the council with an explanation of how its recommendations have been considered or why a recommendation was not acted on.

Attending school council meetings. The principal is required to attend and participate in every school council meeting or to delegate this responsibility to a vice-principal. This requirement acknowledges the important role that principals play in providing support and continuity for their school councils. The principal and vice-principal may both choose to attend the meetings; however, only one of them can represent the school at the meeting in his or her official capacity.

Principals (or vice-principals) are not eligible to vote on any matters being discussed by their school councils, as it is not appropriate that the principal vote on the advice that he or she is given by the school council (e.g., regarding the school's policy on homework for students).

Delegating authority. In addition to attendance at council meetings, the principal may delegate other powers or duties related to the school council to a vice-principal. This is to ensure that the school council is supported by the administration.

Ensuring that the school council is in place. It is important that the school council be ready early in the school year to begin its work with the principal on the many significant areas identified in the regulation. For this reason, school councils must hold their elections within the first thirty days of the start of the school year. The principal's assistance to

either an election committee or to the chair of the previous year's council will go a long way towards ensuring that school council membership is in place within the thirty-day time frame required.

Notifying the community and posting materials for parents. It is important that the school community know the names of the parent representatives who were elected. The principal must publish names of the school council members no later than thirty days following their election. This information may be posted on the school's website and in the school, and may also be published in the first school newsletter sent out after the elections.

The principal can demonstrate his or her support of the council's work by encouraging the school council to prepare notices that can be sent home with students for delivery to their parents and posted in an obvious place in the school for parents to examine. Council news can also be included in the school newsletter.

The principal is legally obligated to notify the school community of the following information related to the school council:

- the date, time, and location of the school council elections, at least fourteen days before the election date
- the results of the school council election (the names of the members elected to the school council), no later than thirty days following the school council election
- the dates, times, and locations of all regular school council meetings and committee meetings
- the annual school council report, including a report of fund-raising activities and financial statements, if applicable (for sample annual report formats and sample financial statements, see Section 10: Accountability)

Providing information. As school councils frequently experience changes in membership as students move on to new schools and as parents find new interests, new council members will have to be briefed on the work of the council. As well, parents new to a school may wish to learn about some of the priorities and activities undertaken by the school council in the past. For these reasons, the following information, which will help parents learn about the evolution and actions of their school council, must be stored in the school and made available for a minimum of four years:

- school council and committee meeting minutes
- financial transactions/records

A council may decide that other documents would also be of value for reference. These might include the following:

- school council agendas
- school council annual reports
- school profiles
- principal profiles
- position papers that were prepared for board consideration or submission to the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Parent Council

The above information should be readily available to parents wishing to learn more about the history of their school council. Regardless of where the material is kept, whether it be in the resource centre or in another location in the school, parents should be made aware of the location and should have easy access to this material.

Developing a school profile. Another important activity in which principals can involve school councils is to invite them to participate in the development of the school profile. Their participation will help them gain an understanding of the needs of the school, an insight into the unique characteristics of their school community, and an understanding of the demographics and other aspects of the school environment. Many schools have found that developing a school profile can be especially helpful in recruiting community representatives and other school council members, during the improvement planning process, or when preparing for a change in the principal or vice-principal. A school profile will also help a council identify the resources that the community might have available or suggest strategies that might be included in the school's action plan. A school profile can include any combi-

nation of information but usually includes at least the following:[2]

- student demographics
- enrolment trends
- languages spoken in the home and the ethnic composition of the community
- the school's and/or board's mission statement
- the school's program priorities
- programs offered in the school (e.g., guidance, library services)
- school facilities
- class sizes
- the rate of student turnover or transfer
- other relevant information, such as the relationship between the school and local French-language cultural organizations in the case of French-language schools, or the links between the school and the parish in the case of Catholic schools

A school council can help ensure that the school profile is kept up to date. By doing so, the school profile can demonstrate over time how changes in any one area have impacted on the school as a whole.

What Do the Regulations Mean for School Boards?

Setting the Stage for Success

Boards have a vital role to play in helping their school councils become well-informed and involved members of their school communities. Boards set direction through their various policies and guidelines and provide important support to the other partners in the education system, such as principals, teachers, parents, and students. School councils that are actively involved in the development and review of board initiatives are more likely to take ownership of the policies that are developed and to support their implementation. By seeking the advice of their school councils, boards will also strengthen their relationship with those school councils.

Board policies and guidelines should be discussed with the new school council early in the school year. A clear understanding of existing policies and guidelines at the outset will enable the members of the council to make meaningful contributions, as necessary, through the course of the year. It will also benefit council members when they review and revise current school council bylaws or create new bylaws in accordance with applicable board policies.

In the numerous reviews of district school boards conducted by the former EIC, it was found that where boards established good channels of communication with their communities, their school councils were also likely to work more effectively in achieving the overall goals and mission set out by the board. Good channels of communication can be established in a number of ways. Boards can regularly forward information about board issues and priorities directly to their schools, post it on their websites, or include it in their newsletters.

Many school boards have found other innovative ways to involve their school councils in board issues. Some do so through a board-wide organization of school councils, referred to variously as a *school council assembly, council of councils, council of chairs,* or *regional council.* In most cases, one representative from each council (either the chair or a member delegated with this responsibility) attends a meeting convened at a central location of the board's jurisdiction. In some larger boards these groups are organized according to families of schools, which each delegate a representative to attend a central meeting. The responsibility of members attending such a meeting varies, but primarily it is to act as a liaison between their councils and the board.

By regularly communicating with school councils and inviting their feedback on the variety of issues they are addressing, school boards help create an environment that is open and receptive to input from school councils and parents. Strong support for school councils at the board level will demonstrate to the entire community that school councils are important partners and will encourage ongoing parental involvement. Strong support from the board will also encourage principals to work closely with their own school councils.

Developing Important Partnerships

Consultation. The nature of consultation by school boards will vary depending on circumstances and, to some degree, on the size of each board. Many boards have adopted strategies to ensure that their policies are reviewed by the communities they represent. When consulting with school councils about policies under development by the board, consideration should be given to the limited amount of time council members may have available.

Consultation by boards can take the form of:

- paper-based surveys or questionnaires distributed to all school councils;
- presentations by board representatives at central meetings (e.g., regional assemblies, councils of chairs);
- town hall meetings held at various locations across the board's jurisdiction;
- focus group meetings involving a representative sample of constituents and school council members.

Each of these formats has its own benefits and disadvantages, and each board will ultimately have to decide which format best suits its needs at any given time. For additional information on this topic, including charts identifying areas that are both mandatory and optional for consultation, see "Consultation With School Councils by Boards and Principals" in Section 4: Consultation.

Reporting back. The new requirement that boards advise school councils of how their recommendations have been taken into account provides each school council with opportunities to learn more about how its board operates and how decisions are made. A strong working relationship between school councils and their boards will provide boards with opportunities to gauge public opinion prior to making decisions and to increase parents' support and understanding.

A board should report back to its school councils in a constructive and positive manner to facilitate discussion with the school council. Each report should outline:

- the decision that was taken;
- how the advice was considered and its impact on the final decision;
- other factors that were considered in making the decision;
- the next steps to be taken by the board regarding the decision;
- any additional opportunities for feedback on the issue or decision.

The way in which a board reports back to school councils will often depend on the nature of the recommendation made by the council. The board's response may be made:

- in a letter to the chair or co-chairs of the school council from the board person who received the advice;
- in person at the next school council meeting by the board person who received the advice;
- through the school principal, who then reports to the school council on the feedback received;
- through a member of the board's council of school councils (where one exists), who then reports back to his or her school council.

Improvement planning. An important area in which the board is to involve its school councils is in the development of the "action plan for improvement". The board action plan for improvement will provide a framework for the school's action plan, whose focus would be more specific. A school's action plan for improvement outlines areas of focus for school improvement, and strategies that a school will take to help achieve these goals. A school council's involvement in the development of the board's action plan for improvement will help council members gain an understanding of the context for the board's and the school's planning. According to the former Education Improvement Commission, "the ultimate objective of the process is to improve student achievement levels by enhancing the way curriculum is delivered, by creating a positive environment for learning, and by increasing the degree to which parents are involved in their children's learning at school and in the home".[3]

To help ensure that the plan is successful, the planning process should include everyone in the board and school community. All those involved must understand that as improving student achievement takes time, it requires an ongoing commitment. Boards, principals, teachers, parents, and students all play unique roles in the development of the plan:

- The board is responsible for establishing the overall framework for improvement planning at each school.
- The principal leads the planning process at the school, consults with the school council, and also identifies any local factors that contribute to student achievement.
- Teachers and students can help develop the overall goals of the plan and are key to the plan's implementation.
- School councils can help in the planning process by consulting and communicating with parents about the process, providing advice to the principal in the development of school policies, and assisting in setting goals and timelines and in monitoring progress.[4]

Selecting a new principal or vice-principal. While school councils must be consulted about all the areas that are identified in the regulations and legislation, many have expressed great interest in being involved in establishing the criteria and process for the selection and placement of new principals and vice-principals. School councils can provide important advice to boards about the key skills a new principal or vice-principal can bring to the school community. The decision to hire and place each principal or vice-principal is still up to the board, but the board must consult with the council about the process and the selection criteria applied.

The process for selecting and placing principals involves a number of stages. Many boards already have processes in place that govern the promotion and/or selection of principals and vice-principals. However, all boards should review their policies to ensure that their school councils have the opportunity to identify the role they wish to play in the process, if any. The board must invite school council members to participate in the review of its principal selection/placement policy. This will enable them to determine the role they want to play in the selection process and the stage at which they would like to be involved.

Regardless of what role they may wish to assume, all school councils should be invited to complete principal profiles to help their boards select and place principals at individual schools. While such profiles may not be required each year, reviewing the profiles periodically as the needs of the school change is a good practice. A principal profile may simply identify, from a list provided by the board, the particular characteristics being sought in a new principal or vice-principal. Alternatively, the profile may be a description, developed by the school council after it has considered a number of focused questions. The samples provided on the following pages are intended to give school councils a sense of the many characteristics and skills that may be considered in the selection and placement of a new principal or vice-principal.

School councils might find it useful to review the current school profile in conjunction with the principal profile samples provided on the following pages. This approach would help council members select the most important attributes that a principal or vice-principal should have in order to meet the identified needs of the school. The attributes selected could then be listed in bullet point form, as shown in "Principal Profile: Sample 3", on page 3.18.

The following are some additional roles that councils might play:

- participating on a review panel to decide whether recruitment of candidates will be internal or external, depending on the availability of internal candidates
- serving on a résumé review committee to make recommendations about which candidates are to be interviewed
- delegating a member to serve as a panel member on an interview committee

Ensuring that the school council plays a key role in a board's principal selection process is essential to the successful implementation of the board's selection/placement policy. It is also crucial that school councils understand (1) the reasons for board policies and (2) that it is a management responsibility of the board to assign staff to a school based on the identified needs of the school, in order to ensure that the school itself continues to grow and develop. For example, many boards have policies that govern the rotation of principals throughout their systems on a periodic basis (e.g., every four or five years). This may seem disruptive, but change is a necessary part of professional growth. As well, fresh leadership and perspectives on learning enhance the professional growth of staff and students. While changes in principals and vice-principals may be uncomfortable for some, it is important that all parents recognize the benefits that new leadership can bring to the school. Involving school councils in such decisions can help ensure a positive start when the new school year begins with a new principal or vice-principal.

Principal Profile: Sample 1

A number of criteria listed in the chart "Principal Profile: Sample 1" on page 3.11 are recognized as essential to the success of school leaders. When completing such a chart in preparation for the selection of a principal or vice-principal, council members should rate each criterion by putting a check mark in the appropriate column – high, medium, or low – to describe the administrator who would best suit the identified needs of their school. (Note that this is not an exhaustive list, and that the council may wish to add items that are of particular relevance to its school.) This kind of list will help to guide the selection team when it considers the principal placement for a school.

Principal Profile: Sample 2

People who are interested in becoming school administrators should demonstrate current knowledge, growth, and skills in a variety of areas. School leaders will have developed these over time, through experience.

The chart "Principal Profile: Sample 2" on page 3.15 could be used as a guide by school councils in identifying the areas that are a priority for their schools and the specific characteristics of leadership that they desire in their principals.

The placement team will refer to the comments in the profile chart to guide them when making recommendations about placing an individual in the school. The placement will be discussed with the school council before the team makes a recommendation to the board.

Principal Profile: Sample 3

The chart "Principle Profile: Sample 3" on page 3.18 is an example of a simple principal profile in which a school council has clearly outlined what it would like to see in a new principal.

Notes

1. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 3(2).
2. Adapted from Education Improvement Commission (EIC), *School Improvement Planning: A Handbook for Principals, Teachers, and School Councils* (Toronto: EIC, November 2000).
3. EIC, *School Improvement Planning*, p. 5.
4. For more information about school improvement planning, see Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), *Ontario Report and Guide on School Improvement Planning* (Toronto: EQAO, 2000), and EIC, *School Improvement Planning*. Both of these publications offer advice to help boards, principals, and school councils develop school improvement plans.

Principal Profile: Sample 1

COMPETENCY

Communication Skills *The ideal candidate should have the ability to:*	**Priority** **High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• listen effectively	☐	☐	☐
• respond clearly and directly (both orally and in writing)	☐	☐	☐
• write and speak appropriately for each situation	☐	☐	☐
• prepare clear and concise memos/notes, instructions, etc.	☐	☐	☐
• interpret instructions (both oral and written)	☐	☐	☐
• describe or explain written information, concepts, or instructions (both oral and written)	☐	☐	☐

Fiscal Management *The ideal candidate should have the ability to:*	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• understand the current economic picture	☐	☐	☐
• understand the budget and staffing process	☐	☐	☐
• identify and prioritize needs (both human and physical) as they relate to the school plan	☐	☐	☐
• involve appropriate people in decision making (staff, students, school council, the community)	☐	☐	☐
• organize and administer the school budget process, in consultation with the school council	☐	☐	☐
• understand the staffing process (e.g., collective agreements, technical aspects, legal requirements)	☐	☐	☐
• ensure that school buildings meet all the requirements set out in health and safety legislation	☐	☐	☐

Group Process *The ideal candidate should have the ability to:*	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• establish goals related to the school's action plan	☐	☐	☐
• work collaboratively with a variety of individuals, including school staff, parents, students, and the community	☐	☐	☐
• share leadership responsibilities	☐	☐	☐
• recognize his or her strengths and limitations and those of others	☐	☐	☐
• gain the confidence and trust of others	☐	☐	☐
• be sensitive to the feelings of others	☐	☐	☐
• communicate effectively	☐	☐	☐
• share the decision-making process, while recognizing any legal limitations	☐	☐	☐
• manage conflict effectively	☐	☐	☐
• provide recognition and celebrate success	☐	☐	☐
• evaluate, review, and validate as required	☐	☐	☐

Knowledge of the Change Process *The ideal candidate should have the ability to:*	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• identify a need for change	☐	☐	☐
• conduct a gap analysis – Where are we? Where do we want to go? How will we get there? How will we know when we have arrived?	☐	☐	☐
• build allies and support	☐	☐	☐
• develop a plan of action	☐	☐	☐

Knowledge of the Change Process *(cont.)*	Priority		
The ideal candidate should have the ability to:	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• empower others	☐	☐	☐
• deal with conflicts/obstacles	☐	☐	☐
• provide guidance, resources, and encouragement	☐	☐	☐
• recognize that people are at different stages in the change process	☐	☐	☐
• recognize that time is an important factor	☐	☐	☐

Leadership Awareness			
The ideal candidate should have the ability to:	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• interpret board and ministry policy	☐	☐	☐
• understand system responsibilities as they relate to the school	☐	☐	☐
• apply current educational research	☐	☐	☐
• manage the development of a school plan, balancing school, board, and ministry objectives	☐	☐	☐
• recognize when a group needs direction	☐	☐	☐
• be accountable for the objectives contained in the school plan	☐	☐	☐

Leadership Behaviour			
The ideal candidate should have the ability to:	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• think holistically	☐	☐	☐
• understand the interrelatedness of leadership behaviours	☐	☐	☐
• make decisions in the context of the "big picture" (i.e., the candidate should have vision)	☐	☐	☐
• put processes, teams, and procedures in place that reinforce the vision	☐	☐	☐
• understand the implications of day-to-day decisions for the school plan	☐	☐	☐
• clarify and communicate policy	☐	☐	☐
• manage the implementation and evaluation of the school plan	☐	☐	☐
• involve others in problem solving	☐	☐	☐
• provide guidance to others to help them achieve shared goals	☐	☐	☐
• provide direction that is appropriate to the tasks and/or activities being undertaken	☐	☐	☐
• monitor and evaluate progress	☐	☐	☐

Organization Management			
The ideal candidate should have the ability to:	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• set and manage priorities	☐	☐	☐
• plan and supervise activities	☐	☐	☐
• establish schedules and timelines	☐	☐	☐
• coordinate resources	☐	☐	☐
• manage crises while maintaining efficiency and effectiveness	☐	☐	☐

Personal Growth			
The ideal candidate should have the ability to:	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• identify his or her own strengths and weaknesses	☐	☐	☐
• develop a personal growth plan	☐	☐	☐
• seek evaluative data from others	☐	☐	☐
• stay current through professional reading and participation in staff-development opportunities	☐	☐	☐

Personal Growth (*cont.*)	Priority		
The ideal candidate should have the ability to:	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• seek involvement on school, area, and system committees	☐	☐	☐
• take risks	☐	☐	☐
• promote, express, communicate, and model personal and educational values and beliefs	☐	☐	☐
• focus on keeping healthy (e.g., by delegating and prioritizing)	☐	☐	☐

Personnel Management			
The ideal candidate should have the ability to:	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• identify steps in the growth and development process	☐	☐	☐
• collect appropriate data	☐	☐	☐
• evaluate objectively	☐	☐	☐
• communicate effectively (both orally and in writing)	☐	☐	☐
• negotiate an ongoing growth plan and follow-up review	☐	☐	☐
• prescribe relevant assistance	☐	☐	☐
• work within current operating procedures	☐	☐	☐
• become informed about the duties of employees being evaluated	☐	☐	☐
• develop effective interviewing skills	☐	☐	☐

Program Management			
The ideal candidate should have the ability to:	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• identify and describe the procedures of a sound program implementation plan	☐	☐	☐
• identify the major obstacles to successful program implementation	☐	☐	☐
• identify the role of key people in program implementation	☐	☐	☐
• develop a comprehensive staff development program	☐	☐	☐
• identify and describe the procedures of program evaluation	☐	☐	☐
• interpret program review data	☐	☐	☐
• draw appropriate conclusions from program review data	☐	☐	☐
• make appropriate recommendations	☐	☐	☐
• develop a plan of action	☐	☐	☐
• allocate resources	☐	☐	☐
• understand ministry and board curriculum policy	☐	☐	☐

Political Management			
The ideal candidate should have the ability to:	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
• recognize the role of government in setting education policy	☐	☐	☐
• identify significant partners (parents, community, staff, council chair, principals)	☐	☐	☐
• understand current issues	☐	☐	☐
• communicate appropriately with school board trustees	☐	☐	☐
• demonstrate fiscal accountability and responsibility	☐	☐	☐
• work within the mandate defined by legislation (e.g., the Education Act and its regulations)	☐	☐	☐
• understand the implications of collective agreements, human rights legislation, and the Education Act	☐	☐	☐
• identify and communicate effectively with the public (e.g., parents, the media, trustees, community groups)	☐	☐	☐

Problem Solving

The ideal candidate should have the ability to:	High	Medium	Low
• identify problems and their relative importance	☐	☐	☐
• collect pertinent information	☐	☐	☐
• identify key personnel	☐	☐	☐
• generate possible solutions	☐	☐	☐
• evaluate alternatives in terms of organizational goals	☐	☐	☐
• reach consensus	☐	☐	☐
• make a clear decision	☐	☐	☐
• support the decision with a rationale	☐	☐	☐
• be sensitive to the needs of the people involved	☐	☐	☐

Principal Profile: Sample 2

AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS

Building a shared vision and commitment

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Priority Yes	Priority No
• involve staff, school council, and the community in the development of a shared vision	☐	☐
• communicate the vision to staff, students, the school council, parents, and the community	☐	☐
• involve all parts of the community in support of the school's vision	☐	☐
• work with staff, school council, parents, and other community members to establish the goals for the school, which are clearly articulated, easily understood, and broadly communicated	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Communications

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Yes	No
• promote a positive attitude and respectful communications among staff, students, parents, and the community	☐	☐
• be approachable	☐	☐
• have effective listening, speaking, and writing skills	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Program review and implementation

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Yes	No
• demonstrate knowledge of curriculum program requirements, including the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs)	☐	☐
• conduct systematic reviews of all programs with input from staff, students, the school council, and parents	☐	☐
• ensure that EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office) test results form an integral part of program reviews and subsequent development of plans for student achievement	☐	☐
• communicate school implementation plans to staff, parents, the school council, and the community	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Assessment, evaluation, and reporting student progress

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Yes	No
• ensure that staff understand and implement a variety of assessment and evaluation measures	☐	☐
• use assessment results to review school programs	☐	☐
• ensure that school results are communicated clearly to parents	☐	☐
• encourage the use of exemplars to determine student levels of achievement	☐	☐
• communicate student progress to parents on an ongoing basis	☐	☐
• inform parents about curriculum, assessment, and evaluation policies	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Community partnerships

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Priority Yes	No
• foster meaningful involvement of parents through frequent communications to the community	☐	☐
• solicit and welcome the views and opinions of the school council, parents, and other community partners in the decision-making process	☐	☐
• promote an environment that values diversity and team building	☐	☐
• focus on extensive communications and information sharing	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Staff development

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Yes	No
• provide opportunities for staff to share in the decision-making process through staff meetings and to participate in professional development activities	☐	☐
• allow staff to manage their own decision-making committees	☐	☐
• showcase examples of teacher leadership and celebrate them	☐	☐
• provide individual staff members with support when they need it	☐	☐
• offer opportunities for peer mentoring, support professional teaching, and share professional literature	☐	☐
• foster a climate of learning	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Effective student discipline

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Yes	No
• create a safe, orderly environment in which students learn and work	☐	☐
• adopt policies and expectations about discipline and behaviour that are clear, fair, and easy to understand	☐	☐
• expect teachers to model good citizenship and positive behaviour	☐	☐
• celebrate student success and achievement	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Positive relationships

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Yes	No
• demonstrate appreciation for the contributions of staff, the school council, parents, and other community members	☐	☐
• publicly acknowledge staff for their involvement in school activities and special events	☐	☐
• display energy and enthusiasm	☐	☐
• inspire respect and use humour to provide perspective	☐	☐
• structure interactions so all groups feel they are a meaningful part of the school community	☐	☐
• identify the various groups of the community and ensure their involvement	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Problem solving

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Priority Yes	No
• model problem-solving and communication strategies that staff can use when working with students, parents, and colleagues	☐	☐
• engage others in finding solutions	☐	☐
• investigate issues thoroughly before taking actions	☐	☐
• quickly identify conflicts and act to resolve them before they escalate	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Supervision of staff in professional growth and improvement

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Yes	No
• provide leadership in ensuring that staff are well informed about education policies and practices	☐	☐
• be aware of current trends and issues, as well as threats and opportunities, in the school environment	☐	☐
• assist others in their professional growth	☐	☐
• ensure that staff understand that they are expected to pursue their own professional growth	☐	☐
• use the school goals as the basis of discussion with individual teachers about their own professional goals and guide teachers towards improvement in their teaching practice	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Management skills

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Yes	No
• support teamwork	☐	☐
• follow through on decisions jointly with teachers	☐	☐
• allocate resources to support school goals	☐	☐
• trust staff to make decisions within the framework of school goals	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Technology

Indicators – The ideal candidate will:	Yes	No
• be up to date with technological advancements	☐	☐
• promote technology as a tool to gather, compile, and sort information	☐	☐
• use technology as a communication tool and for information sharing	☐	☐

Comments/other:

•

•

Principal Profile: Sample 3

The _____ High School School Council has developed a principal profile in anticipation of the placement of a new principal in the school. The ideal candidate will:

- encourage the development of programs that meet the academic, social, and extracurricular needs of young adults;
- be able to communicate expectations clearly to students, staff, and parents;
- be committed and involved in all aspects of school life;
- support all levels of ability, from gifted to general;
- be a leader, able to motivate staff and students, and be flexible in approach;
- be able to develop, articulate, and implement a policy on discipline fairly and consistently;
- be willing to promote the best interest of the school to students, staff, the community, and the board;
- be experienced in a dual-stream school;
- network with feeder schools and neighbourhood schools;
- be enthusiastic, caring, and respectful of young people;
- have a sense of humour;
- have a strong academic orientation;
- support and encourage the professional development of staff.

Consultation

"To consult" means to seek advice, to confer, to discuss, or to deliberate on the views and opinions held by others. In the spirit of the regulations regarding school councils, there are clear expectations that all partners be consulted:

- School boards and principals are to seek advice from their school councils.
- School councils are to seek input from the parents of their school community about matters under their consideration.

Consultation With School Councils by Boards and Principals

To ensure that parents, through their school councils, are able to influence decisions affecting their children's education, the school council regulation clearly directs school boards and principals to actively seek the views of their school councils on a variety of matters. Under the regulations, school boards and principals are now required to ask for the views of their school councils before they make decisions on certain matters.

Boards and principals are also required to inform their school councils on how the recommendations have been taken into account when decisions related to their recommendations are made. This is a meaningful addition to the responsibilities of school boards and principals. Including school councils in the development or revision of policies and guidelines or the implementation of education initiatives affirms their role as a key partner in the education system.

The table on page 4.2 outlines the areas in which boards and principals are required to consult with school councils.

Ontario Regulations 612/00 and 298 advise boards and principals that they are also free to solicit the views of their school councils on any matter outside the mandatory areas for consultation. School councils are able to make recommendations in areas such as those listed in the table on page 4.3. School councils, boards, and principals may wish to work together as they develop or review policies, or develop board and school implementation plans.

AREAS REQUIRING CONSULTATION WITH SCHOOL COUNCILS

By Boards	By Principals
Policies Under Development and/or Review	
– all initiatives that relate to the improvement of student achievement or enhance the accountability of the system to parents	– all initiatives that relate to the improvement of student achievement or enhance the accountability of the system to parents
– the provincial code of conduct	– the school policy regarding code of conduct
– appropriate dress policy	– the school policy regarding appropriate dress for students
– a policy on reimbursement of expenses incurred by school council members	
– fund-raising activities by school council members	
– a policy or process for resolving internal school council disputes	
Planning	
– the board's action plans for improvement based on reports of EQAO test results	– the school's action plans for improvement based on reports of EQAO test results
– development of communication plans regarding the board's action plans for improvement	– development of communication plans regarding the school's action plans for improvement
– the criteria and process for the selection and placement of principals and vice-principals	
Implementation Plans	
– any new education initiatives at the board level	– any new education initiatives at the school level
– the board policy regarding the code of conduct for students	– the school policy regarding the board policy on the code of conduct for students
– the board policy regarding appropriate dress	– the school implementation plan for the board policy regarding appropriate dress
Other	
	– the annual review of the decision to recite the pledge of citizenship on a daily basis
– the development of a plan providing for co-instructional activities	– the sharing (at least once a year) of the school plan providing for co-instructional activities

POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL AREAS FOR CONSULTATION WITH SCHOOL COUNCILS

Areas for Consultation	By Boards	By Principals
– the local school year calendar, including the beginning and end of the school year (modified school year calendar)	X	
– scheduling special school events		X
– board policies regarding field trips for students	X	
– school policies regarding field trips for students		X
– list of approved activities to fulfil the mandatory community involvement requirement as stated in Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 124	X	
– review of the board's safe-arrival policy and implementation plan as required in PPM No. 123	X	
– review of the school's safe-arrival policy and implementation plan as required in PPM No. 123		X
– use of volunteers in the school	X	X
– school closures	X	
– twinning schools	X	
– review of school boundaries	X	X
– naming of new schools and other board property	X	
– busing and transportation of students	X	
– capital improvement plans for schools	X	X
– purchase of textbooks and other learning materials	X	
– developing principal profiles	X	
– developing school profiles		X
– student-homework policies	X	X
– school/classroom organization		X
– additional funds to school councils according to their local priorities	X	
– school budget priorities		X

Consultation With Parents by School Councils

One of a school council's main purposes is to share information with parents and the community and to seek their ideas and views about matters under consideration by the council. When and how this happens depends on the issues before the council. The impact of issues before council will vary – from having no direct or indirect impact on the students in the school to affecting all students in the school. The issue before the council will determine when it is appropriate to consult with parents and the community. Some issues may only require that information be provided to the school community. Other issues may require obtaining a formal position from the school community.

For example, if your council is planning to develop a policy on homework, it may want to ensure that such a policy reflects the views of the majority of the school's parents, thus necessitating a full-scale school-community consultation. On the other hand, such widespread consultation would not be necessary if, for example, the council wanted to invite students to help plant flowers on the school property for a "Green Day" activity. Your council may wish to establish a framework that will guide its decisions about consultation.

It is important to note that full-scale school-community consultation is required to develop an appropriate dress policy for your school. Boards should already have developed a process that enables a majority of parents, through their school councils, to decide on what an appropriate dress policy should be for their own schools.

Regardless of how often a council consults with the parents of its school community, parents will want to know the results of the consultations. Just as councils will expect their boards to respond to them, it is equally important that each council lets its parents know how it has acted on the input they have provided.

Any one or a combination of the following suggestions might be suitable methods of consultation and response:

- Hold a town-hall-style meeting to discuss issues and present information.
- Ask for input by distributing a survey, or send home a newsletter with a tear-off response form to be returned to the school.
- Conduct a telephone blitz of all parents.[1]
- Hold focus group meetings at various times to ensure that all parents also have the opportunity to participate.
- Post information and requests for feedback on the school website.

For other ideas and suggestions that can help councils become more knowledgeable about their communities and establish and maintain open channels of communication with the diverse groups that make up those communities, see "Communication Strategies for Community Outreach" in Section 9: Communication.

Notes

1. Schools may provide school councils with parents' telephone numbers only if they have the consent of parents to do so.

Effective School Councils

Your school council will provide advice to the school principal and to the school board on a wide range of issues. Although your council can make recommendations to the principal or the board on any matter,[1] your efforts should focus primarily on the issues that fall within the purpose or mandate set out for school councils in Ontario.[2] Establishing a set of priorities for the year will help your school council stay focused and be effective.

Characteristics of Effective School Councils[3]

Effective school councils are those that:

- focus on student learning and the best interests of all students;
- are actively involved in setting school priorities for improving student achievement;
- promote meaningful parental and community involvement and actively seek the views of their school communities;
- have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities;
- include members who represent the diverse views of their school communities;
- keep well informed about school and board policies and procedures;
- have clear and consistent processes for decision making;
- communicate with the community about their activities;
- maintain high ethical standards;
- have members who have developed mutual trust and respect for one another.

Preparing and Training School Council Members

Every year, a number of new school council members may be elected to your council. Each new member will bring his or her unique talents, strengths, and expertise. These new members must be given opportunities to become acquainted with their roles and responsibilities so that they are aware of the importance of the commitment they are making, understand their duties as council members, and become effective participants.

Orientation for New Members

To help new school council members become acquainted with their roles, your council might want to compile an orientation package that includes resources such as the following:

- a copy of this manual
- a copy of Ontario Regulations 612/00 and 298, which set out the legal requirements for and responsibilities of school councils, boards, and principals
- information about the school, the local school board, and the Ontario Ministry of Education
- the school council's bylaws relating to election procedures, conflict of interest, and conflict resolution, and any operating bylaws, if bylaws have already been established
- the school council's code of ethics for its members, if your council has one
- the school profile

Your council's first meetings will help introduce new members to other members and orient them to

the education system and their role in it. Agendas for the initial meetings might include some of the following activities:

- welcoming members and completing introductions
- orienting members on your council's past priorities and goals
- reviewing the work undertaken by the various committees and identifying needs for the future
- establishing dates for future meetings
- electing a chair or co-chairs and other officers according to established bylaws

Note: How to prepare agendas and how to run effective meetings are discussed in Section 8: Preparing for and Running Meetings.

Ongoing Training

Training for school councils should be ongoing. Seasoned school council members will need to keep up with information about new education initiatives and how those initiatives will affect the role of the school council. New school council members will need to find out about the basic requirements of school councils. Continuing members will want to know how they can improve some of their fundamental skills, such as taking minutes, completing financial reports, or even writing, if they wish to take on a role as newsletter editor, or coordinator.

Members of school councils should try to take advantage of as many training opportunities as possible, as training can help provide council members with the tools they need to be effective. As council members come and go, training is particularly important for new members. School councils should work with their boards to determine what training should be offered. If your school council has considerable expertise to offer, it could consider offering a training session for other councils.

Locally organized training within the board's geographic area may provide an excellent, cost-effective method of providing training tailored to local council members' needs. Through such training, council members will learn new things, develop new skills, and have the opportunity to meet members of other school councils. The local library may have material that provides information on taking minutes, financial reporting, goal setting, and strategic planning. The World Wide Web may also provide training possibilities for council members.

To be effective, your school council must involve the parents of the school community, and must keep them involved. School council meetings that are punctual, interesting, productive, and efficient will help achieve this, as will making parents feel that their contributions are valued. Offering parents a chance to learn something new at meetings will ensure that meetings remain interesting. If time permits, guest speakers, panel discussions, debates, videos, or even an occasional field trip may be included in the school council meeting schedule to maintain a high level of interest and participation.

Participation Through Committees

The use of committees[4] can help other parents, as well as parent members of the council, participate and contribute in areas that meet their interests or expertise and the time they have available. A number of committees may be established under the school council's operating bylaws. The decision on what committees and how many committees are required is left up to the individual councils. Committees might be formed to focus on areas such as finance, bylaws, parent volunteer recruitment, special events, election of parent members, and appropriate dress.

Every committee must include one parent member of the council. Committees may also include others who are not members of the school council. Committee meetings must follow the same rules as school council meetings: all committee meetings are entitled to be held at the school, must be open and accessible to the public, and are to be publicized by the principal in the same way that regular school council meetings are.

Recruiting Community Representatives

Your council can begin the recruitment process by finding out more about the members of your community. In many areas, particularly in urban centres where there are greater numbers of immigrants, it is especially important to find ways of encouraging participation from the various and diverse ethno-cultural groups that make up the school community. For a number of reasons, some parents from these groups may be hesitant to involve themselves in local education matters regarding their children. Recruiting community representatives from the ethno-cultural groups in the school community to liaise with parents would serve to strengthen the links between the school and its diverse community partners and assure these partners that the school welcomes the active involvement of all parents.

To find out who makes up your school community, what information your school community receives and needs, and how information is presently provided, your council might consider questions such as the following:

- Who belongs to our school community?
- What is the racial and ethno-cultural composition of the community?
- What organizations exist?
- Who are the community leaders?
- To whom does the school and parent group send information?
- What information does the school communicate to our community?
- Does the information satisfy all of the diverse needs of the community?
- What do the members of our community need to know?
- How do the school and the school council currently exchange information with the diverse elements of our community?
- Does the school or the school council have a contact person in each outside organization or network?
- Is two-way communication promoted?

Identifying and appointing one or more community representatives, depending on the council's bylaws, may involve the following three stages:

1. Examine the needs of the school and the knowledge and skills that your council will require. Community representatives to the school council support the work of the council and the school by tapping into a vast network of resources. Your council should seek individuals from a variety of backgrounds and should carefully consider what kinds of community representatives it is seeking. In preparation for recruiting representatives, the council should identify specific needs or expertise that might be needed in the school. It should then list the resources that the community might contribute to meet those needs. (Your school profile will help you determine what expertise the school requires.)

Your council may wish to consider representatives from the following examples of groups:

- employer groups or associations, such as the board of trade or chamber of commerce (these groups may be particularly important at the secondary school level)
- social service agencies
- health-care service organizations
- non-profit organizations (e.g., consider a person with experience in recruiting volunteers)
- senior citizens' groups
- community service agencies
- the parks and recreation department
- cultural agencies and arts groups (e.g., art galleries, theatres, musical groups)
- service clubs
- business and industry groups
- labour groups (e.g., the local labour council)
- neighbourhood representatives
- the parish council
- Aboriginal groups
- French-language cultural groups
- representatives of racial or multicultural groups

2. Prepare an information package for potential community representatives. Since those invited to serve on your school council will be asked to commit a significant amount of time to the work of the council, they will want to know how they can contribute. An information package should contain material that will give them this kind of information. Be sure to include a copy of the school profile and some of the school's newsletters and annual reports.

3. Identify and select potential community representatives. When appointing community representatives, the chair and/or members of a council could follow a procedure similar to the following:

- Consult your council's bylaws to confirm how many community representatives are required.
- At a school council meeting, discuss potential community representatives and develop a list of candidates. (The list should contain more names than the council requires in case one or more individuals decide not to join the council.)
- Determine how each candidate might contribute to the achievement of the council's priorities.
- Identify the candidates in order of preference based on the needs of the school.
- Designate one member of the council, such as the chair or a co-chair, to recruit the appropriate number of community representatives from the list of candidates identified by the council.
- Provide the potential members with copies of the information package. (Some people may want to review the information package before agreeing to become a member.)
- Formally appoint the community representative(s), in accordance with the school council's bylaws.

Team Building

Trust and respect are essential if the members of your council are to function effectively as a team. Team-building activities that include discussing the council's purpose, goals, and vision are ways to build trust and get to know each other's beliefs, values, interests, and areas of strength. An orientation session prior to the first formal meeting might help begin this process. Building positive working relationships among council members will strengthen and promote teamwork. As trust and respect develop, council members will become more open to sharing opinions, taking risks, and resolving conflicts in a positive manner.

To different degrees, every group goes through the following four stages, although the length of each and the sequence will vary. It is helpful to be aware of these stages when you and your fellow members are feeling stuck, frustrated, or unproductive.

- *Forming.* Group members are polite, impersonal, watchful, and guarded.
- *Storming.* Some group members are trying to avoid conflict, while others are confronting people, opting out, having difficulty, or feeling stuck.
- *Norming.* Group members are developing skills in such areas as conflict resolution, listening to and evaluating other points of view, and giving feedback. They are also establishing procedures to deal with issues.
- *Performing.* Group members are becoming resourceful, flexible, open, effective, close, and supportive.

School Council Code of Ethics

Your school council may find it useful to establish a code of ethics that outlines the council's expectations of its members and guides their behaviour. The code may address matters such as the boundaries of the role and responsibilities of the school council, conflict of interest, and the manner in which members are expected to interact, in the interests of preserving democratic principles and minimizing and/or managing conflict. A sample code of ethics is provided on page 5.5. (Information about avoiding internal conflict or dealing with it when it does arise is provided in Section 7: Establishing Bylaws.)

CODE OF ETHICS

- ***A member shall*** consider the best interests of all students.
- ***A member shall*** be guided by the school's and the school board's mission statements.
- ***A member shall*** act within the limits of the roles and responsibilities of a school council, as identified by the school's operating guidelines, the school board, and the Ontario Ministry of Education.
- ***A member shall*** become familiar with the school's policies and operating practices and act in accordance with them.
- ***A member shall*** maintain the highest standards of integrity.
- ***A member shall*** recognize and respect the personal integrity of each member of the school community.
- ***A member shall*** treat all other members with respect and allow for diverse opinions to be shared without interruption.
- ***A member shall*** encourage a positive environment in which individual contributions are encouraged and valued.
- ***A member shall*** acknowledge democratic principles and accept the consensus of the council.
- ***A member shall*** respect the confidential nature of some school business and respect limitations this may place on the operation of the school council.
- ***A member shall*** not disclose confidential information.
- ***A member shall*** limit discussions at school council meetings to matters of concern to the school community as a whole.
- ***A member shall*** use established communication channels when questions or concerns arise.
- ***A member shall*** promote high standards of ethical practice within the school community.
- ***A member shall*** declare any conflict of interest.
- ***A member shall*** not accept any payment or benefit financially through school council involvement.

Source: Adapted from the bylaws of the Port Arthur Collegiate Institute School Council, Lakehead Board of Education, Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Roles and Responsibilities of School Council Members

Accepting the role of school council member carries with it certain responsibilities. Each school council may define the roles and responsibilities of its members in its operating bylaws. These operating bylaws may include the expectation that members attend council meetings regularly. All council members are encouraged to be familiar with their council's expectations of members and be prepared to make a commitment to conduct the council's business in a professional manner.

There may be instances when an elected member fails, on a regular basis, to attend school council meetings, leaving the council without the quorum required to hold a meeting. To deal with this possibility, the council may consider including in its bylaws a provision for the chair or co-chairs to determine with the individual member whether he or she is able or willing to continue to serve on the school council. In many cases, the member may not be aware that his or her continued absence is affecting the council's ability to carry out its mandate under the regulation. On being made aware of this consequence, the member may be willing to make regular attendance a priority. In other cases, the individual may decide to resign from the council, thereby creating a vacancy in its membership.

It is important to remember that Ontario Regulation 612/00 contains no provision for the discretionary removal of a duly elected or appointed school council member before the end of his or her term. Bylaws created by a school council, or policies established by a board, must not conflict with the provisions of the regulation. A school council member is, therefore, entitled to hold his or her position until the term expires.[5]

As noted earlier (page 5.4), council members may be asked to adhere to a code of ethics that governs their actions and deliberations.

Some of the duties that might be expected of each of the representatives on the school council are described below. Your council may wish to add other duties to reflect the needs of your local community.

The Chair/Co-Chairs

The chair/co-chairs of the council are elected by the council members and must be a parent or parents who are not employed by the school board.[6] The chair/co-chairs are voting members who, in addition to performing the same duties as other council members, might:

- arrange for meetings;
- prepare agendas;
- chair council meetings;
- ensure that minutes of council meetings are recorded and maintained;
- facilitate the resolution of conflict;
- participate as ex-officio members of all committees established by the school council;
- communicate with the school principal on behalf of the council.

Note: A school council's operating bylaws may outline other specific duties for the chair/co-chairs, as well as for other officers of the council, such as a secretary or treasurer.

Parent Representatives

Parent representatives are voting members who:

- participate on any committees established by the school council;
- contribute to the discussions of the school council;
- solicit the views of other parents and members of the community to share with the school council;
- observe the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

School Principal

The school principal must be a member of the school council, as he or she is an important link between the council and the school. (In fact, a meeting cannot be considered a meeting of the school council

unless the principal, or delegated vice-principal, is in attendance.) However, the principal is not a voting member of the council.[7] The principal:

- distributes promptly to each council member material identified by the ministry for distribution to school council members and posts the material in a school location accessible to parents;
- acts as a resource to the council on laws, regulations, and board policies;
- attends all school council meetings, unless this responsibility has been delegated to the vice-principal;
- considers each recommendation made by the school council to the principal and returns to the council with the action taken in response to the recommendation;
- solicits views on matters pertaining to the establishment or amendment of school policies and guidelines[8] relating to student achievement, accountability of the education system to parents, and the communication of those plans to the public;
- may participate on any committees established by the school council;
- may solicit the views of the school council on any matter;
- observes the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

For further information on the principal's roles and responsibilities, see "What Do the Regulations Mean for Principals?" in Section 3: The Regulations Governing School Councils.

Student Representative(s)

The student representative is a voting member who:

- contributes to the discussions of the school council;
- solicits the views of other students to share with the school council;
- may participate on any committees established by the school council;
- communicates information from the council to other students;
- observes the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

School Staff Representatives (one each from the teaching and non-teaching staff)

School staff representatives are voting members who:

- contribute to the discussions of the school council;
- solicit views from their staff groups to share with the school council;
- may participate on any committees established by the school council;
- communicate information back to their staff groups;
- observe the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

Community Representative(s)

The community representative(s) is a voting member who:

- contributes to the discussions of the school council;
- represents the community's perspective;
- may participate on any committees established by the school council;
- helps build partnerships and links between the school and the community;
- observes the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

Representative of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, or Parents Partenaires en Éducation

The representative of one of these organizations is a voting member who:

- contributes to the discussions of the school council;
- represents the views of his or her association;

- may participate on any committees established by the school council;
- communicates information back to his or her association;
- observes the council's code of ethics and established bylaws.

Involving Parents and the Community

Parents play the first and most important role in their children's education and are key partners in building a quality education system. One purpose of the school council is to promote and support the involvement of all parents in their children's learning.

School councils can involve all parents by:

- providing parents with information and ideas about curriculum-related activities, decisions, planning, and how to help their children with their homework;
- communicating effectively with parents about school programs and children's progress;
- recruiting and organizing parents' help and support;
- identifying and using community resources and services that strengthen school programs, family relations, and student learning and development;
- inviting parents who have particular expertise to speak to the council (e.g., a nurse to speak about the nutritional needs of children, a marketing professional to help the council with a communication plan);
- helping parents establish home environments that support their children as students (e.g., helping them with homework, asking them about the day's events, showing an interest in their extracurricular activities, expressing care, and giving guidance).

This involvement contributes both to the children's success in school and to the quality of the school environment. Because parental involvement is so important, school councils need to break down any barriers between the home and the school and make the school a warm, receptive place for parents.

School councils should encourage all parents to participate, welcome them to school council meetings, and inform them of the many ways in which they can be involved.

Parents play a valuable role by being members of school councils. Celebrating the council's successes and communicating its accomplishments to the community helps retain the commitment of current school council members and encourages other parents and community representatives to become involved in the future. Involving parents throughout the year on committees and in other volunteer roles is an excellent way to spark interest and motivate parents to contribute in various ways to their children's education. *Every parent has something to contribute.*

Staying Focused on the Mandate

While school councils play a significant role, it is important that they act within the scope of the duties that are outlined in the provincial regulations and policies.[9] These regulations and policies should be a part of every council member's package and should be reviewed carefully during the orientation of all new council members. It is important that all members clearly understand the regulations and policies so that they know where the boundaries lie in terms of what is – and what is not – within the scope of their duties. For example, there is an important distinction to be made between providing advice and acting as an advocate on a specific issue.

It is important that school councils maintain a broad focus on a range of issues of school-wide concern. From time to time, a school council may encounter the particularly difficult situation in which a council member demands that the council devote all of its attention and energy to a single issue. In some cases, the member's passion for the issue may be counterproductive to the council's efforts to achieve its goals.

Despite such challenges, members should try to focus their energy on fulfilling their mandate. For example, by setting goals to improve a school's

learning environment, school councils, in collaboration with boards, principals, teachers, parents, and other community members, can make their schools better places in which to learn. Participating in the development of the school's action plan for improvement is an excellent way for a school council to contribute to creating an environment that fosters student achievement. The school's action plan is a road map that shows the changes a school needs to make to help students improve their achievement. The school council should work closely with parents, the principal, staff members, and other community members in drafting the plan. It would be beneficial for the school council to have completed a school profile, which will help it in drafting the school's action plan. For more information, see "Developing a school profile" on page 3.6 and "Improvement planning" on page 3.8.

As specified in the regulation, school councils can provide advice to the principal and the board on any matter. It should be noted, however, that they are not authorized to perform managerial or administrative responsibilities that belong to the principal or to other school administrators. For example, assessing teacher performance in the classroom is the responsibility of principals and superintendents, who are granted this authority under the Education Act.

Questions of Legal Liability and Insurance

School councils should focus on the well-being of students in the school and must not allow their efforts to be derailed or distracted by special interests, especially if the special interests are not education issues. If a school council engages in activities beyond its assigned duties (e.g., by providing after-school child care, running music programs, organizing a Christmas party or social activity), it could be held liable for any problems that occur. School councils wanting to go beyond their duties and responsibilities as set out by the ministry, the board, and the school may want to inquire about their liability. If in doubt, a school council should seek clarification about what is and what isn't covered by the board's insurance policy. This information can be provided by the principal or a superintendent or other appropriate official at the board office.

The Ontario School Boards' Insurance Exchange (OSBIE) is the insurance company that provides coverage to many school boards. School councils are encouraged to refer to the OSBIE website, www.osbie.on.ca, which includes information that relates to school councils.

Assessing Your Council's Effectiveness

It is important that your school council take time periodically to discuss and evaluate what it has been doing. All too often, school councils find that there is so much to do that there is little time left to reflect on or assess their direction and practices.

Evaluation forms or surveys are one way to collect information for the purposes of improving your meetings or council processes. An impartial observer may also play a valuable role in assessing your council's effectiveness. Your council should be sure to factor in time for specific discussions regarding progress on strategic plans and action plans to ensure that you are making progress.

A sample questionnaire that school councils may want to use to gauge the council's effectiveness is provided on page 5.10. Such a questionnaire could be distributed to council members to gather their opinions. Council members should be told that they do not have to sign the questionnaire.

Notes

1. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 20.
2. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 2.
3. Adapted from Anthony Bryk, John Easton, David Kerbow, Sharon Rollow, and Penny Sebring, *Report of the Steering Committee Consortium on Chicago School Reform* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, July 1993).
4. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 13.
5. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 6(1).
6. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 8.
7. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 14(3).
8. See Regulation 298, section 11(19).
9. For a list of current ministry policy/program memoranda, visit the ministry's website at www.edu.gov.on.ca.

ASSESSING YOUR COUNCIL'S EFFECTIVENESS

Are council meetings effective?

☐ rarely ☐ sometimes ☐ mostly ☐ always

How could council meetings be improved?

Are we on track with our strategic plan?

☐ not at all ☐ somewhat ☐ mostly ☐ consistently

What is the next step in our council's strategic plan?

What is going well?

Do we need to change any of our processes?

How do we want to improve?

Setting Goals and Priorities[1]

It is important that your school council establish priorities and set goals, and stick to them. Otherwise, there is a real chance that your council will wander, wondering what to do first or, even worse, trying to do too much and not being as productive as it could be. Determining priorities will allow members to focus on areas of activity chosen for special emphasis over a period of time. Setting goals will give members a clear sense of what they want to achieve over the course of their term.

At the beginning of the school year, your school council may wish to determine the expectations and priorities of the school community and find ways to meet them. Your school council may want to open their planning discussion by asking these questions:

Where are we?
Where do we want to go?
How will we get there?
How will we know when we have arrived?

These questions will initiate discussion and give school council members the opportunity to share information and generate ideas. All members of the council, including the principal, will have the opportunity to review information about past and current achievement, imagine the school's future, and develop specific plans for achieving their vision for the future. This is just the beginning of the planning process. To monitor progress, goals and priorities should be reviewed quarterly. Based on the review, the plan may be adjusted, if necessary, so that expectations can be met.

This type of planning:

- provides a framework for determining how the school council can improve its performance;
- focuses efforts and resources effectively on the goals set by the council;
- provides a framework for decision making, since decisions are linked to goals;
- encourages teamwork by involving all members of the school council;
- maximizes the use of time.

The following sample exercises may be used individually or in sequence depending on the needs of your school council. They can be completed at meetings of your school council throughout the course of the year and do not necessarily have to be completed within the first few months. Planning takes time, so be prepared to spend time in the planning process.

Note

1. This section is adapted from Alberta Education, *School Councils Handbook* (Edmonton, Alta.: Alberta Education, 1996).

Sample Goal-Setting and Planning Exercises

Exercise 1: Assessing the current situation

This exercise may help your school council identify issues – an important step in the planning process.

In small groups, discuss the following questions:

- Who are our students?
- How have they performed on province-wide tests?
- What is our community like and what are the school's relations with the community?
- What are the emerging trends in education?

Appoint a facilitator in each group to stimulate discussion and to group ideas. Allot ample time so that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. When the allotted time is up, ask the facilitators to present the ideas to the whole council. A main facilitator should then summarize the information. This summary will help your council identify its priorities.

Exercise 2: Identifying the issues

This exercise may help your school council identify specific issues and prioritize them for discussion at a subsequent meeting. In this way your council can begin to establish its long-term priorities. Each school council member should answer the first three questions individually. Then the whole council should review common issues and prioritize them for further discussion.

1. List, in order, the top educational issues in Ontario today.

   _____ _____

   _____ _____

   _____ _____

2. List, in order, the top issues for your school and school council.

   _____ _____

   _____ _____

   _____ _____

3. Do you think the list of issues noted in #2 or their order will change over the longer term (within the next two to three years)? If you do, show the revised list below. This information will be useful for long-term planning.

   _____ _____

   _____ _____

   _____ _____

4. Compare lists created by the individual members of the school council. What common issues have been identified?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. Choose one or more of the common issues for discussion.

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. Identify your goals based on the priorities that have now been established.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise 3: Identifying goals – A process for developing group goals

Since some school councils may have no more than ten people, this exercise is a good way of involving more parents when establishing the school's long-term goals. Consulting with parents demonstrates that they have an active role to play in their children's education at the local level and encourages parental participation.

(Participants should be in groups of four or five.)

- Have each person write five to six phrases on separate self-stick notes that each identify a goal, purpose, or direction.
- Place each of your group's participants' phrases on a flipchart, grouping common goals.
- Discuss the common goals in your group and become familiar with the ideas.
- Develop at least one goal statement for each of these common ideas.
- Together with other groups, compare the lists and develop a common list of goals.
- Based on consensus, prioritize goals.
- For each goal statement identify internal and external forces that may help or hinder you in reaching your goals.
- Back in your small groups, seek creative ways and alternative solutions to achieving your short- and long-term goals.

Exercise 4: Developing an action plan

This exercise can help you focus on the goals you have identified and provide you with concrete and creative ways of achieving them. Start with the following strategies:

- For each identified goal, brainstorm a number of ways to achieve it.
- Determine the most promising strategies – those for which time, talent, and resources are available.
- Develop an action plan.

The format of your action plan could resemble that of the sample on the following page. Such a plan would identify the activities you are planning to achieve your goals, those responsible for the activities, the necessary deadlines, and the resources needed to carry out the activities successfully. The last column of the action plan could be used to evaluate the activities in relation to the achievement of the school council's goals.

Exercise 4: Developing an action plan (*continued*)

Action Plan for: *Recruiting Volunteers* **Year:** _____

Goal: *To increase the involvement of volunteers in the school* **Page #** _____

Activities	Person(s) Responsible	Deadline	Resources Required	Evaluation

Establishing Bylaws

School councils are not required to develop lengthy constitutions, since Ontario Regulation 612/00 sets out the mandate and roles and responsibilities for school councils. In effect, the regulation serves as the constitution for the school council. (If a school council already has a constitution in place, the council may wish to continue to use it, provided that it does not conflict with the provisions of the regulation.) Similarly, in the presence of the regulation, boards are not required to develop policies on school councils, except for policies dealing with the reimbursement of expenses incurred by members and officers of school councils while conducting council business, policies on fund-raising, and policies that address the resolution of internal conflict on a school council. Boards are, however, required to consult with school councils when developing these policies. While boards may want to facilitate the work of councils that are developing the required school council bylaws, they are not required to do so.

School councils must develop certain bylaws to provide them with direction for the operation of council business and to help the council work effectively. The development of operating bylaws should begin as soon as possible after a council meets for the first time. At a minimum, the regulation requires councils to develop bylaws to address the following areas:

- election procedures
- filling vacancies
- conflict of interest
- conflict resolution procedures

Bylaws governing other areas of operation may also be developed.

Once bylaws have been developed, your school council may want to review them from time to time, although they do not need to be rewritten each year. Conflict resolution bylaws must be established in accordance with any applicable policies established by the board.

Your council may also wish to develop bylaws related to the following:

- a school council code of ethics (see the sample under "School Council Code of Ethics" in Section 5: Effective School Councils)
- general expectations regarding meetings (e.g., attendance, promptness)
- the number and scheduling of meetings (at least four meetings must be held each school year)
- the number of parent members on the council and the number of members required for a quorum (in compliance with Ontario Regulation 612/00)
- the number, description, and duties of executive officers
- any requirements regarding signing officers
- the establishment and roles of committees
- a process for seeking input from the community

It is important to ensure that bylaws created by the school council do not conflict with any of the provisions of Ontario Regulation 612/00.

This section of the guide includes sample bylaws for election procedures and for filling any vacancies that may appear on your council. Section 9: Communication may also help you with the task of developing bylaws.

Election Procedures

According to Ontario Regulation 612/00, elections must take place at the same time each year – within the first thirty days of each school year.[1] However, in the case of a new school, the first election must be held during the first thirty days of the school opening, on a date fixed by the board that established the council. Since September is a busy time of the year for parents and educators, school councils may want to prepare an election plan in June.

Many school councils establish in their election bylaws an election committee that is responsible for ensuring that each constituent group (parents, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, students) holds its own election for representation on the school council. The method of filling the position(s) of community representative(s) may also be outlined in a school council's bylaws.[2] The appearance of conflict of interest can be avoided by establishing an election committee composed of individual council members who will not be standing for election the following year. Note that in the case of a new school, the principal may want to form and chair the election planning committee or invite interested parents to do so.

If there is an established parents' association at a school that is a member of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, or Parents Partenaires en Éducation, one representative would be appointed by that association to the school council.[3]

The following pages contain a sample schedule for the school council election of parent representatives, sample nomination forms for parent candidates, a sample nomination form receipt, a sample school council election ballot, and sample election procedure bylaws.

Sample Schedule of Events in Planning for the School Council Election of Parent Representatives

May/June	■ A committee is established to deal with the school council election of parent members.
Early to mid-June	■ A plan is put in place to deal with how the school council election will occur. By the last council meeting of the school year, the date,* time, and location of the election are determined, as well as how the election will be advertised in the fall. A nomination form is also developed. ■ School council chairs must have the necessary information for the election to the principal well in advance of the election.
Mid-August	■ In the welcome-back-to-school mailing, the principal includes parent-candidate nomination forms and information about the date by which nominations must be received at the school, who is eligible to stand for election, the date of the election, and other information about the election. This package must be in parents' hands at least fourteen days prior to the election.
Early September	■ The principal posts school council election information in an area of the school that is easily accessible to parents. Good venues would be the bulletin board and the school website. ■ Parents return nomination forms to the school.
Early to mid-September	■ A list of parent nominees with brief biographies is sent home or mailed out, with a reminder of the election date and information on the election process.
Mid- to end September	■ The ballot box is prepared for the election of parent representatives, and arrangements are made for volunteers to help voters at the voting areas. ■ The election of the teacher, non-teacher, and student representatives may take place at the same time or shortly after the election of parent representatives.
Late September to early October	■ The first meeting of the new school council takes place, and meeting dates, times, and locations for the upcoming year are determined. (The first meeting of the new school council must take place within thirty-five days of the start of school.) ■ The names of the new school council members are publicized to the school community within thirty days of the election, as are the dates, times, and locations of future meetings.

* According to Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 4(4), the election must be held during the first thirty days of the school year on a date fixed by the school council chair or co-chairs after consulting with the school principal.

SCHOOL COUNCIL PARENT SELF-NOMINATION FORM

☐ I wish to declare my candidacy for an elected position as a parent/guardian representative on the school council.

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Home phone: _____ Business phone: _____

E-mail: _____

I am the parent/guardian of _____, who is currently registered at this school.
(name of student)

I am an employee of the board.

☐ yes ☐ no

_____ _____

Candidate's signature Date

Please include a brief autobiography on the back of this form.

You will be notified when your nomination has been received.

SCHOOL COUNCIL PARENT CANDIDATE NOMINATION FORM

☐ I wish to nominate _____ for an elected position as a parent/guardian representative on the school council.

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Home phone: _____ Business phone: _____

E-mail: _____

I am the parent/guardian of _____, who is currently registered at this school.
(name of student)

_____ is the parent/guardian of _____,
(name of person nominated) *(name of student)*

who is currently registered at this school.

The person I have nominated is an employee of the board.

☐ yes ☐ no

_____ _____

Nominator's signature Date

Please include a brief biography of the candidate you have nominated on the back of or on a separate sheet attached to this form.

You will be notified when your nomination has been received.

Sample Nomination Form Receipt

NOMINATION FORM RECEIPT

The nomination form for parent/guardian representative on the school council for

_____ at _____

(parent nominee's name) *(school name)*

has been received by:

_____ _____

Name of principal or chair of the nominations committee Date

Sample School Council Election Ballot

SCHOOL COUNCIL ELECTION BALLOT

Date: _____

School: _____

For: *Parent/guardian representatives* _____

Vote for no more than _____ candidates on this ballot.

Place an X in the box before the name(s) of the candidate(s) of your choice. Note that persons whose names are marked with an asterisk are employees of the school board.

☐ _____	☐ _____
☐ _____	☐ _____
☐ _____	☐ _____
☐ _____	☐ _____
☐ _____	☐ _____
☐ _____	☐ _____
☐ _____	☐ _____
☐ _____	☐ _____
☐ _____	☐ _____

[A similar ballot form could be used for teacher, non-teacher, and student elections.]

Sample Election Procedure Bylaws: Sample 1

ELECTION PROCEDURE BYLAWS

1. Elections shall occur within the first thirty days of the start of each school year.

2. Each parent/guardian seeking election must be nominated or self-nominated in writing, must have a child registered at the school, and must declare if he or she is employed by the school board.

3. Each parent/guardian of a student enrolled in the school shall be entitled to one vote for each vacant parent/guardian membership position on the council.

4. An election committee shall be struck by the school council in May to help plan the election process, the gathering of nominations, and the running of the election. No one standing for election, or the spouse of anyone standing for election, shall be a member of the election committee.

5. The election committee shall:
   - provide nomination forms;
   - ensure that the school community is notified of election procedures and election date(s), location, and time, at least fourteen days in advance of the election;
   - request a profile from all candidates and make these available to the electorate;
   - conduct the elections by secret ballot;
   - count the ballots;
   - help the principal notify all candidates of the results;
   - keep all results and related information confidential.

6. Only the names of the successful candidates shall be made public. A list of candidates and the vote results will be kept on file by the council for use in the event that a vacancy on the council occurs.

7. All individuals standing for election shall be notified of the results before the results are released to the school community.

8. The school council shall help the principal ensure that the names of new members are publicized to the school community within thirty days of the election.

9. At the first meeting of the new school council at the beginning of the year, the council shall set dates, times, and locations for its meetings throughout the year.

Source: Adapted from Holy Name of Mary School Council, Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, Almonte, Ontario.

ELECTION PROCEDURE BYLAWS

1. *School council election committee.* The current school council will establish a school council election committee. The committee must ensure that a new council is in place within thirty days of the start of the school year in September. The committee should have representation from parents, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and students.

2. *Considerations for the school council election process.* In any given year, the term of office for all school council positions is one year. Appeals related to the school council election process or results shall be resolved by the school council election committee. If the situation is not resolved, the school principal and the chair of the outgoing council shall jointly make a ruling.

3. *Election of parent/guardian representatives*
   a) Parents/guardians of a student enrolled at the school are eligible both to vote for and to run as parent candidates. Self-nomination will suffice. No additional qualifiers or quotas may restrict eligibility either to vote for or to run as a parent candidate (e.g., child's program, grade, location of home). Candidates should be prepared to summarize their reasons for running for the school council. They must also declare if they are employed by the school board.
   b) Nomination forms shall be filed by all parent-candidates for elected positions on the school council. Parents may nominate themselves or other parents.
   c) Information about candidates shall be made available to the school community at least one week before the election.
   d) If the number of candidates is less than or equal to the number of positions, the candidates shall be acclaimed.
   e) No individual campaign literature for school council elections may be distributed or posted in the school.
   f) School resources, both human and material, may not be used to support particular candidates or groups of candidates.
   g) The election day proceedings shall be publicized by the principal at least fourteen days prior to the election.
   h) The election day proceedings shall be supervised by the principal.
   i) The principal shall conduct a lottery to determine the ballot position for each candidate.
   j) Elections for school council shall be conducted by secret ballot. Voters must be present at the school on the election day(s) during the preset hours for voting (to include both daytime and evening hours).

k) All eligible voters shall be entitled to cast one vote for each of the candidate positions available. Casting more than the maximum number of votes permitted in the category spoils the ballot.

l) Ballots shall be counted by the principal in the presence of at least two parents who are not election candidates.

m) If there is a tie for the final position for a representative on the school council, the winner shall be determined by lot.

4. *Election of the teaching staff representative*
   a) The principal, in consultation with the election committee, will make the necessary arrangements for the teaching staff representative to be elected.

   b) Anyone assigned to the teaching staff of the school (full- or part-time) other than the principal or a vice-principal may be a candidate.

5. *Election of the non-teaching staff representative*
   a) The principal, in consultation with the election committee, will make the necessary arrangements for the non-teaching staff representative to be elected.

   b) Anyone assigned to the non-teaching staff of the school (full- or part-time) may be a candidate.

6. *Appointment or election of the student representative*
   a) For elementary schools. The principal will consult with other members of the school council to determine if there is to be a student representative on the council. If a positive decision is reached, the principal appoints a student representative to the council.

   b) For a secondary school. If the school has a student council, it will appoint a student representative to the council. Otherwise, the principal, in consultation with the election committee, will make the necessary arrangements for the election of the student representative.

7. *Selection of community representatives.* All appointments of community representatives to the school council are to be by majority vote at a meeting of the school council.

Source: Adapted from the "Thames Valley District School Board School Council Handbook".

Filling Vacancies

School councils must develop bylaws to address the issue of membership vacancy.[4] A vacancy in the membership of the school council may be filled by election or by appointment, in accordance with the bylaws set by the individual school council. (School councils that want the option of filling a vacancy by appointment must ensure that a bylaw is in place to provide for that option. Otherwise, the vacancy must be filled by election.) If an election is to occur to fill a vacancy, then the election rules set out in Regulation 612/00 apply. Should a vacancy occur on the school council, the council is not prevented from exercising its authority; it can continue to operate as long as there is a quorum and the majority of council members are parents.

The council members should be aware that a majority of parents must be present when a vote is taken or if decisions are made. Should the number of parent members on council fall below a majority, the council will need to take steps to fill those vacancies. If a vacancy occurs in the office of the chair/co-chair or any other officer of the council, it is to be filled in accordance with the school council's bylaws.

Vacancies occur in school council membership for various reasons:

- Not all positions on the school council were filled after an election.
- A member resigns.
- A member is unable to fulfil the roles and responsibilities (e.g., due to illness).

Here are some sample vacancy bylaws.

Sample Vacancy Bylaws

Sample 1

1. Should an elected parent/guardian council position become vacant before the next election, the council shall fill the vacancy by appointment from the non-elected candidates from the previous election.
2. If none of the previous candidates remain interested in becoming a council member, the council may request that interested parents/guardians from the school community submit their names for consideration. The council shall then appoint one of those who indicate an interest.
3. When a vacant spot on council is filled, the new member's term shall expire at the time of the next election.

Source: Adapted from the bylaws of Holy Name of Mary School Council, Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, Almonte, Ontario.

Sample 2

If any school council positions become vacant because of resignation, inability of a member to fulfil his or her roles and responsibilities, or other cause, the remaining members shall constitute the school council, unless the parent/guardian majority is not maintained. If the majority of parents on the council is not maintained, the school council shall instruct its nominating committee to send home nomination forms for the vacant position(s) for parents on the council and to hold an election for the purpose of filling the vacancy. Vacant positions, other than for parent representatives, may be filled by appointment of the council for the remaining term of office, from among members of the school community who meet the requirements set for the vacant positions.

Source: Adapted from St. Francis Catholic School, "School Council Operating Guidelines", Paris, Ontario.

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest for a school council representative is any situation in which the individual's private interests may be incompatible or in conflict with his or her school council responsibilities.

School councils are advisory bodies and would almost never be in a position to make decisions that would be of financial benefit to individual council members. However, a conflict of interest may exist whether or not a monetary advantage has been or may be conferred on the school council member or his or her family.

A conflict of interest may be actual, perceived, or potential:

- *Actual:* When a school council member has a private interest that is sufficiently connected to his or her duties and responsibilities as a council member that it influences the exercise of these duties and responsibilities.
- *Perceived:* When reasonably well-informed persons could reasonably believe that a school council member has a conflict of interest, even where, in fact, there is no real conflict of interest.
- *Potential:* When a school council member has a private interest that could affect his or her decision about matters proposed for discussion.

As conflict of interest can arise in a variety of situations, all school councils must develop a conflict of interest bylaw to ensure the objective involvement of school council members both in appearance and fact.[5] Samples of such a bylaw are given on page 7.13.

A school council member should try to avoid situations in which:

- a conflict of interest is likely to result;
- the member's ability to carry out his or her duties and responsibilities on the council may be jeopardized;
- the council member or his or her relatives gain or benefit indirectly;
- favours or economic benefits are accepted by the council member from any individuals, organizations, or entities known to be seeking business contracts with the school;
- any family member, friend, or person, organization, or business entity associated with the council member will be favoured.

School council members have a duty to declare to the chair/co-chairs that they are in a conflict of interest situation when any of the above situations occur or may potentially occur.

A school council member may occasionally find him- or herself in a conflict of interest position in terms of some issue under consideration by the council. When this happens, the member should declare that he or she is in a conflict of interest situation and either leave the room for that portion of the meeting or refrain from participating in the discussion, whichever other council members are more comfortable with. The member should not vote on any decision made on the issue.

Here is an example of a conflict of interest situation: The school council is discussing the construction of a new playground and possible contractors. The brother of a parent member of the school council is a building contractor, who intends to bid on the contract. The council member could, therefore, find him- or herself in a potential conflict of interest situation.

Sample Conflict of Interest Bylaws

Sample 1

Any time the school council does business with the potential for monetary gain/loss with any person, agency, or company, and a member of the school council has a vested interest in any way with that particular person, agency, or company, that member shall declare a conflict of interest and shall not discuss or vote on any such resolution relating to the matter.

Source: Adapted from the St. Francis Catholic School, "School Council Operating Guidelines", Paris, Ontario.

Sample 2

Each school council member shall avoid situations that could result in an inconsistency between the overall goals and vision of the school council and a personal or vested interest, that arise in connection with his or her duties as a school council member.

Should an issue or agenda item arise during a council meeting where a council member is in a conflict of interest situation, he or she shall declare conflict of interest immediately and decline from the discussion and resolution.

Sample 3

1. A conflict of interest may be actual, perceived, or potential.

2. Members of the council shall declare a conflict of interest in matters that they, members of their families, or business entities in which they may have an interest, stand to benefit either directly or indirectly by decisions of the council.

3. A member shall exclude him- or herself from discussions in which:
   - a conflict of interest is likely to result;
   - the member's ability to carry out his or her duties and responsibilities as a member of the school council may be jeopardized;
   - the council member, his or her relatives, or a business entity in which the member may have an interest, may gain or benefit either directly or indirectly as a result of actions that may be taken by the principal or board in response to advice that the council provides to the principal or to the board.

4. A member shall not accept favours or economic benefits from any individuals, organizations, or entities known to be seeking business contracts with the school.

Avoiding or Dealing With Conflict

Conflict is a natural part of human existence. In a structured environment, where mutual trust and respect prevail, it can be a positive force. It can encourage people to find creative solutions, clarify an issue, increase the involvement of members, encourage growth, and strengthen relationships. However, conflict also has an ugly side. Left uncontrolled, it can divert energy from the group, destroy morale, polarize individuals, deepen differences, obstruct progress, and create suspicion and distrust. Each school council must have a bylaw that outlines a process for addressing internal conflict.[6] (Sample bylaws are given on page 7.16.)

When conflict is resolved collaboratively, both the whole group and the individuals within the group are strengthened. It comes as no surprise that well-honed communication skills are essential to conflict resolution. This section outlines some ways to prevent, diffuse, and resolve conflict.

To a large degree, conflict can be prevented or diffused at an early stage if differing points of view are handled carefully by the chair. Here are a few simple strategies for those chairing meetings to ensure that these differences are accommodated in a constructive manner:

- Focus the discussion on council issues.
- Take control in a firm, positive, constructive way.
- Establish an agenda that is agreed on by all present.
- Establish ground rules for behaviour.
- Develop a code of ethics for school council members (see the example provided in Section 5: Effective School Councils).
- Treat each person's concerns as legitimate.
- Use the group to help modify the situation. Ask questions such as "Grace is suggesting that we change the order of the agenda. What does the rest of the group think?"

The following is a four-step approach to resolving conflict:

1. *Acknowledge the conflict.* As a group, acknowledge when a conflict exists and determine the source of the conflict. For example, is it related to facts? Goals? Processes? Values? Personal preferences? Beliefs? Communication?
2. *Plan how to deal with the conflict.* Once the source of the conflict is defined, decide how to deal with it. This may be done by the chair, another individual on the council, or the entire council. (In particularly difficult times, it may be best to engage a person who has no association with the council to facilitate discussion and problem solving.) At this stage, all council members should reflect on the problem and be prepared to state their concerns and viewpoints.
3. *Provide time for discussion.* The chair or whoever is facilitating the discussion should introduce the problem and ask each member for input so that the nature and source of the conflict are clear. Acknowledging each person by listening attentively sets the tone for problem solving and opens the council to a variety of solutions. Emotions should be accepted and dealt with since they are a part of conflict.
4. *Seek the best solution.* As viewpoints and solutions are described, the individual facilitating the discussion deals with them one at a time.

Following the discussion, the person facilitating the discussion may use a process for building consensus to arrive at a new solution. Council members will be asked the following questions: Can you live with this solution? Will you support the solution?

Depending on the nature of the conflict, it is sometimes best for council members to have time to reflect on the proposed solution, with the decision to be finalized at a future meeting. If the conflict cannot be resolved, the group may wish to seek the assistance of resource staff at the school board.

Conflict can often be avoided and solutions more readily achieved when positive working relationships exist. It is important that council members take the time to get to know each other's values, beliefs, and interests. The use of good communication skills will help clarify the council's discussions and prevent misunderstanding and conflict. A code of ethics for school council members will help all members understand what is expected.

Resolving Conflict

From time to time, school councils may find that they are not able to come to agreement on matters under their consideration. Consistently being unable to find common ground in decision making is almost certain to result in a dysfunctional council.

In such cases, it is important that the council take time to identify the issues that seem to be triggering its disputes. Often, the volume of disputes may be reflective of unhappiness or uncertainty among members of the council. Alternatively, the disputes may be a healthy sign of growth and development in your council.

It is also possible that, in spite of all efforts of a council to be productive and to work collegially as a team, the unhappiness among some council members may be so great that it polarizes council members on particular issues. Actions taken independently, such as sending unauthorized information home to parents on behalf of council, can seriously jeopardize the council's effectiveness. Other signs of dysfunction may be verbal abuse or harassment of other council members or the chair, constantly interrupting speakers, interjecting derogatory comments, or displaying behaviour that is unbecoming of adults entrusted to represent their community. Such behaviour is bound to jeopardize attendance at meetings and to discourage potential members from seeking positions on the council. As a result, the council risks losing its credibility and the confidence of the school community. In such cases, it is especially important that the chair be willing to take firm and consistent action to restore order so that the council can continue working towards achieving its goals.

Two examples of bylaws dealing with conflict resolution that can be adapted by councils are provided on page 7.16.

Notes

1. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 5(1).
2. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 3(3).
3. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 3(1)8.
4. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 7 and section 15(2)1.
5. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 15(2)2.
6. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 15(2)3.

Sample Conflict Resolution Bylaws

Sample 1

- Every school council member will be given an opportunity to express his or her concern or opinion about the issue at dispute and how the dispute has affected him or her.
- Speakers to an issue will maintain a calm and respectful tone at all times.
- Speakers will be allowed to speak without interruption.
- The chair's responsibility is to clarify the statements made by all speakers, to identify common ground among the points of view raised, and to set out the joint interests of all members.
- If no common ground can be identified, the chair will seek to clarify preferences among all members before proceeding further.
- If all attempts at resolving the conflict have been exhausted without success, the chair shall request the intervention of a superintendent or other senior administrator to facilitate a resolution to the conflict.

Sample 2

- Council members are elected to serve the school community and will demonstrate respect for their colleagues on council at all times.
- If a council member or members become disruptive during a meeting, the chair shall ask for order.
- If all efforts to restore order fail or the unbecoming behaviour continues, the chair may direct the individual council member(s) to leave the meeting, citing the reasons for the request.
- The removal of a member for one meeting does not prevent the council member from participating in future meetings of council.
- The incident shall be recorded and submitted to the Superintendent of Schools within one week of the meeting.
- When the chair has requested the removal of a member or members from a meeting, the chair shall request that the disputing members of council participate in a special meeting, the purpose of which will be to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution to the dispute. Such a meeting may be a private meeting, and shall not be construed as a meeting of the council.
- The chair may request the intervention of an independent third party to assist in achieving a resolution to the dispute.
- An independent third party may be a board official or another individual mutually agreed on by the parties involved in the dispute.
- Any resolution reached at the meeting to resolve the conflict shall be signed and respected in full by all parties to the agreement.

Preparing for and Running Meetings

Establishing Meeting Dates and Publicizing School Council Meetings

Establishing a meeting schedule for the entire year should probably be done at the first meeting of the school year. Some councils find it best to schedule meetings at the same time on the same day each month (e.g., at 7:00 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month during the school year). When setting meeting dates, care should be taken that all council members will be able to attend and that no member is eliminated due to other fixed commitments.

By establishing the year's meeting dates early in the school year, council members can note the dates in their calendars, and the dates, times, and locations of the meetings can be advertised so that other members of the school community can build them into their schedules too. Then, by setting and sticking to a timed agenda at each meeting, members and visitors will learn that they can depend on a definite start and finish time, which should help encourage attendance.

School council meetings should be well advertised to ensure that anyone who has an interest in matters before the council knows that there is an open, sincere invitation for them to attend. Principals can facilitate this by communicating with parents and the community on a regular basis to keep them informed of the activities being undertaken by the council. Meetings can be publicized within the school community in various ways:

- As soon as possible after the dates are established, circulate the year's meeting schedule as widely as possible throughout the community.
- Advertise in school and community newsletters, noting important or special agenda items.
- Post meeting dates on the what's-on sign outside the school, if one is available.
- Use a phone-tree system to remind parents of upcoming meetings.
- Publicize meetings at community events.
- Post meeting dates on the school's website.

The Meeting Space

School councils are entitled to hold their meetings at the school,[1] and it is expected that there will be no charge for the use of school space for this purpose. As school council meetings must be open to the public,[2] the meeting location(s) must be accessible and convenient to all members of the school community, including those with disabilities.

The meeting space should be set up in a way that encourages participation, and all the necessary equipment and supplies should be readily available so that the meeting can proceed with minimal interruption. The meeting space should be generous, and tables should be provided for council members. Tables and chairs should be arranged in such a way that council members can see each other when issues are being discussed. A checklist like the one provided on page 8.2 is useful when organizing council meetings.

MEETING ROOM ORGANIZER CHECKLIST

Meeting

Date: _____

Start time: _____

End time: _____

Participants

Number: _____

☐ List of participants is attached

Facilities

☐ Size of meeting room is appropriate

☐ Lighting/heating/air is adequate

Council member seating at tables to be arranged in:

☐ a rectangle ☐ a circle

☐ U-shape ☐ a square

☐ other _____

☐ Extra chairs for committee reporter or guests

☐ Pleasant atmosphere conducive to discussion

☐ Signage directing guests to meeting room is in place

Refreshments

☐ Tea, coffee, juice, other _____

Equipment

☐ Slide projector ☐ Transparencies

☐ Extra bulbs ☐ VCR

☐ Extension cords ☐ Microphone

☐ Flipchart(s) ☐ Markers

☐ Pens ☐ Paper

☐ Overhead projector ☐ Transparency pens

☐ Masking tape

☐ Name tags or name cards for tables

☐ Laptop and projector for power point presentations

☐ Extra agendas and previous minutes

☐ Other _____

Creating an Agenda

A carefully planned and organized agenda is key to a successful meeting. A good agenda briefly outlines what you intend to discuss and in what order. A reasonable time frame, which allows sufficient time for discussion of all the agenda items, should be allotted. The items on the agenda should reflect the priorities of the school council, which should reflect the concerns and interests of the school community.

The task of developing the school council meeting agenda is usually the responsibility of the chair/co-chairs. Additional agenda items may be submitted by other council members and the principal.

When developing an agenda, be sure to:

- provide a place on the agenda for welcoming guests and introducing new people and non-members;
- remember to include "declaration of conflict of interest" at the beginning of the agenda (see "Conflict of Interest" in Section 7: Establishing Bylaws);
- review the minutes of the previous meeting and include items that need revisiting ("business arising from the minutes");
- determine if there is any "old business" or updates that should be included;
- include time for committee reports;
- determine what "new business" should come before the council;
- include time for brief reports from the principal and student, staff, and community representatives;
- include a period of time for general questions.

It is usually necessary to establish a deadline for the submission of agenda items to allow enough time to develop the agenda, post it in the school, and send it out to council members with minutes from the previous meeting at least a week before the meeting. A sample agenda is provided on page 8.4.

Keeping Minutes of School Council Meetings

School councils must keep minutes of all council meetings, and these must be available at the school for examination by anyone without charge.[3] Minutes are usually recorded by the secretary of the school council and are to be kept at the school for a minimum of four years. Your council's operating bylaws should address where the minutes will be kept and the process to be followed to access this information when requested.

Accurate minutes provide school council members and the school community with a brief but clear summary of what went on at a meeting, including decisions, future plans, reports, and who is responsible for what. School council minutes should note discussion areas but should not include the discussions themselves. Minutes should also include a list of those attending the meeting and those who are absent. (Note that it is a good idea to pass around an attendance sheet during the meeting and have those present sign it. The meeting chair can check with members at the end of the meeting to ensure that they have signed the sheet.)

Some councils use a laptop computer to facilitate recording minutes. Others audiotape their council meetings, in addition to taking minutes, to provide a verbatim record of motions and to help clarify any dispute.

Samples of minutes of school council meetings are provided on pages 8.5 – 8.7.

SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETING

[*Date*]

[*Location*]

Agenda

Welcome and introductions (15 minutes)

Business arising from the minutes (5 minutes)

Old business/updates (10 minutes)
- Farewell plans for international students
- School council annual report to the board
- Bylaw amendments

New business (45 minutes in total)
- Review of the EQAO Grade 3 and Grade 6 test results
- School council input to principal placement process
- Draft school council code of ethics
- School council training workshop

Principal's report (20 minutes)

Reports (45 minutes in total)
- School image
- Promotions, communication, and marketing
- Curriculum and new provincial/board initiatives
- Community representative
- School Council Assembly

General information updates and inquiries (maximum 5 minutes)

Next meeting date, time, and location

Agenda items for next meeting

Adjournment

SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETING

[*Date*]

Minutes

Members Present: _____

Regrets: _____

Agenda Item	Decision/Action Taken	Person(s) Responsible
Welcome and introductions	Call to order: 7 p.m. Welcome and introduction of guests	Chair
Review and approval of agenda	_____ moved that they be accepted. _____ seconded the motion. CARRIED.	
Review and approval of previous minutes	_____ moved that they be accepted. _____ seconded the motion. CARRIED.	
Declaration of conflict of interest	[*The teacher*] declared conflict of interest regarding the status of negotiations on the teachers' collective agreement.	
Business arising from the minutes	Thank-you letters were sent out to the corporate sponsors of the school's drama production.	Public Relations Committee
Old business	• Bylaw amendments were circulated for the council's consideration. • Motion made by _____ , the committee chair, to approve the amendments. CARRIED.	School Council Bylaws Committee
New business	• Review of the EQAO Grade 3 and 6 test results was led by the principal. A preliminary plan was presented for consideration, with a focus on three areas for improvement. • Input to the principal placement process by the school council.	Council members to provide feedback to principal Chair to submit results of discussion to supervisory officer

Agenda Item	Decision/Action Taken	Person(s) Responsible
	• Draft School Council Code of Ethics circulated for the council's consideration.	Members to review and prepare comments for next meeting
	• School Council Training Workshop. Discussion. What do we want out of this workshop?	Chair to provide board with results of discussion
Principal's report	Enrolment for next year is above the current year's numbers. This will result in fewer split grades in the middle grades. Class sizes will be at the average (25 students per class) with four classes at the primary level below 25 students and three classes in the higher grades with more than 25 students. The board will be reviewing its transportation routes for students for the next school year and is looking for school council members to participate on the review committee.	
Other reports	[*Community representative*]: Several sponsors are providing tangible support for the Grade 6 field trip to be held this year.	
Public comments	The school's efforts to involve seniors in school activities are appreciated.	
Next meeting date	[*date/month/year, location, time*]	
Agenda items for next meeting	• Code of ethics	Principal and chair to summarize comments submitted by members.
	• Appropriate dress policy	Council members to consider strategy to survey parents and provide comments for next meeting.
	• Results of feedback regarding the School Improvement Plan	Principal to summarize comments, revise plan as appropriate for the council, and provide information at the next meeting.
	• Other agenda items are to be submitted to the chair two weeks prior to the next meeting.	
Adjournment	9 p.m.	

Sample School Council Meeting Minutes: Sample 2

_____ School Council Meeting

[Date, Location]

Minutes

The regular council meeting was called to order by the [*chair/co-chairs*] at 8:15 p.m. and a quorum was present.

Chairperson: [*name of person*]

Present:

The agenda was approved [*or "approved with one change . . . "*]

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as read. [*If they were photocopied and distributed before the meeting date, they can be approved "as circulated" and you don't have to spend time reading them aloud at the meeting. If there were errors, they "were approved with corrections."*]

Old Business

- *Evaluation of progress towards goals to date.* _____ noted the results of the survey regarding the proposed homework policy were above what had been anticipated. It appears that a strong consensus is developing about homework for students; however, all results have not been tabulated. A formal report will be presented at the next meeting, along with recommendations to the principal on a proposed policy for the school.

New Business

- *Teacher appreciation.* _____ volunteered to head the Appreciation Committee. Various suggestions of ways of showing appreciation for the teachers were made by council members, including providing a continental breakfast one morning before the end of the school year. The committee will review the suggestions and provide the council with a recommendation at the next meeting. The chair of the committee stated that all of the suggestions that were put forward for consideration would require funds to carry out the teacher appreciation initiative successfully.

MOTION: That the _____ school fund-raising committee release one hundred dollars to the Appreciation Committee (_____) [*Put mover's and seconder's names here.*]

ACTION: [*name of individual to act on passed motion.*]

The next meeting will be a special meeting to discuss bylaws on [*date*] at [*time*] in the [*location*]. The next regular meeting will be held [*date*] at [*time*] in [*location*].

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

_____ _____

Secretary Chair

Source: Adapted from Alberta Education, *School Councils Handbook* (Edmonton, Alta.: Alberta Education, 1996).

Making Decisions

Running a school council meeting can be as formal or as informal as your council decides, but even informal meetings require some ground rules to help people work together and reach good decisions. A set of operating bylaws will help your council work effectively. (See Section 7: Establishing Bylaws.)

Your council will have to make many decisions. Deciding how decisions will be made is the first order of business for a new school council. There are two basic ways of making decisions: the less formal way is by reaching consensus; the more formal way is by voting (e.g., following Robert's Rules of Order). Each process is described below.

Consensus

In trying to reach consensus, members have to put much effort into trying to find alternatives to which everyone can agree. Because everyone helps reach, and must agree to, the final decision, all members have the chance to influence and understand the decision. As a result, the final decision may be reached with less conflict than with a formal vote and should receive everyone's support. One caution: the chair should ensure that everyone is heard equally and that quieter or less assertive members are not overshadowed by more vocal or assertive members.

Consensus:

- gives all council members an effective voice in decisions;
- builds on differing perspectives and values;
- allows for flexibility in arriving at solutions;
- can result in better-informed, more creative, balanced, and enduring decisions;
- ensures that final decisions have the support of everyone, thus promoting a sense of commitment to and ownership of the decisions;
- creates a sense of common purpose;
- allows all council members to maintain the integrity of their personal values while agreeing to a new solution.

The following are the basic steps to take to arrive at consensus:

- Identify the issue or problem.
- Relate the issue to goals.
- List the alternatives or solutions.
- Explore and weigh the solutions in terms of meeting agreed-on goals.
- Choose the solution that best meets the goals.
- Plan to implement the solution.

Arriving at a decision that everyone can support requires time, a clear process, skill, and the full participation of all members.

Here are some suggested phrases for the chair to use as council members try to reach consensus:[4]

- Let's begin by getting a reaction from everyone in the group.
- Let me summarize what I hear you saying.
- Let me repeat what I think I heard you say.
- Let me ask you. . . .
- Has everyone had the opportunity to express an opinion?
- Let me see if I can pull together a recommendation.
- Is anyone uncomfortable with this recommendation?
- Let's take five minutes to re-evaluate our positions and prepare statements to share with others.
- Do you want to table this question and discuss it again at the next meeting?

Once a decision is reached by consensus, your council may choose to formalize it through a motion. The result of the vote should be unanimous.

Consensus takes time, commitment, patience, and persistence. As a process, it will strengthen your team by building trust, valuing the diversity of opinions, and energizing and involving all members as equal participants.

Decisions by consensus that are null and void
Any decisions that contradict provincial laws and regulations, local policy, or school council bylaws are out of order and invalid.

Voting

Decisions reached by voting often expedite the business of a meeting as they usually take less time to reach.

If your council chooses to reach decisions by majority vote, everyone on the council should be well informed, and the council as a group should discuss all of the implications before a vote is called by the chair.

If your council decides to make decisions by majority vote *formally*, some simple rules of order can be followed. The following simplified rules of order[5] may be useful:

Making a motion

1. An individual must be recognized by the chair before "obtaining the floor" to make a motion. This means that the chair must let a person know that it is his or her turn before that person can speak to the council and formally propose a course of action.
2. Once an individual has the floor, he or she may make a formal proposal, or motion, beginning with the statement "I move that . . . ".
3. Before the motion can be considered, another individual must second the motion by saying "I second the motion". This does not necessarily indicate that he or she agrees with the proposal, only that he or she believes that it is worthy of discussion.
4. Once a motion has been made and seconded, the chair restates the motion ("states the question") so that everyone clearly understands what is being proposed. From this point on, until the motion is voted on, all discussion must focus solely on the question.
5. If members of the group wish to discuss the motion, the chair opens debate. Each participant may speak to the question twice, but no one may speak a second time until everyone has had the chance to speak once.
6. If no one wants to speak further to the issue, the chair may ask the council if it is ready for "the question" (ready to vote on the proposal). The chair then repeats the motion and conducts the vote by asking for those in favour and those opposed. (The vote may be conducted by a show of hands, by standing, or by secret ballot.)
7. The majority needed to pass a motion should be stated in the school council bylaws. In case of a tie, the motion is defeated.

Amending a motion

Until the chair states the question (repeats the motion) for a final vote, the person who made the motion may change it, although the original seconder may wish to withdraw, requiring another seconder. Once the question has been stated, however, the motion can be amended in one of the following ways:

1. The person making the motion may ask to change the original wording. The chair will ask if anyone objects. If no one objects, the wording of the motion is changed. Debate continues on the motion as amended.
2. If someone does object, the question of whether to allow a change in the wording of the motion is put to a vote. If the group consents to the change, debate continues on the motion as amended.
3. Someone else may move to amend the motion by saying, "I move to amend the motion by. . . ". If so, the normal process for a motion, as outlined above in the "Making a Motion" section, is followed.
4. An amendment to the amendment may also be proposed, but a third amendment is out of order.
5. If the amendment has been defeated, discussion returns to the original motion.

Withdrawing a motion

1. At any time before a vote, the person making the original motion may ask to withdraw it. The motion to withdraw does not require a seconder. Once the question is withdrawn, it is as if it never existed.
2. If the chair has already stated the question and a request to withdraw the motion is made, the chair asks if there is any objection. If there is none, the motion is withdrawn. If someone objects, the request to withdraw the motion is put to a vote.

Tabling a motion

A motion to table a motion means to set it aside for discussion at another time so that more pressing business can be discussed or more information about the issues can be obtained. The following rules apply to tabling a motion:

- The motion to table a motion takes precedence over the discussion of the motion.
- The motion to table a motion requires a seconder.
- There can be no debate on a motion to table.

Motions that are null and void

Any motions that contradict provincial laws and regulations, local policy, or school council bylaws are out of order and invalid, even if voted on and passed by a majority vote.

Effective Meeting Strategies

You will know that a council meeting has been effective when all participants feel that:

- the meeting had a purpose;
- they have a sense of accomplishment;
- they contributed to the discussion;
- they were valued by others;
- creative ideas, alternatives, or solutions were generated;
- they were able to share different points of view;
- they are committed to the decisions made and the actions taken;
- they are willing to work together again.

School councils should have the opportunity to fully discuss every agenda issue. Generally speaking, the chair is responsible for facilitating this process.

Meetings are most successful and productive when council members listen and present their ideas effectively. The key to understanding is listening to and really hearing what others are saying. A major barrier to effective communication is a tendency to evaluate without listening first to what others have to say. The following will help you listen to and really understand what others are saying:

- Give your full attention to the speaker.
- Think about what the speaker is saying and take notes, if you find that helpful.
- Ask questions or paraphrase to clarify meaning (e.g., "Do you mean ...?", "What I hear you saying is ...", "Let me see if I understand what you are saying ...").

Council members should make every effort to present and convey information, opinions, and feelings clearly and succinctly. Doing so will promote good communication within the council. The following will help you present your point of view clearly:

- Think about what you want to say.
- Jot down key points.
- Avoid using jargon that others may not understand.
- Ask for feedback to ensure that everyone understands your position.

The next three sections provide some suggestions to help the chair/co-chairs facilitate meetings. The techniques presented can be used to help participants express their views and solve problems.[6]

Methods for Stimulating Discussion

Chair initiation. The chair invites a wide range of people to speak, and all who wish to speak are given the opportunity, with time limits given to each speaker.

Pairing. People are randomly paired off to discuss an issue and then report back to the group.

Table-go-round. The chair invites each person around the table, in order, to speak to an issue (if he or she chooses), with a time limit given for each speaker.

Absolute quiet. School council members are given a specific amount of time to think, read, or make notes relating to the issue being discussed.

Methods for Generating Ideas

Brainstorming. The following ground rules help brainstorming become an effective problem-solving tool:

- Work with the whole council.
- Ensure that everyone is clear on the issue to be brainstormed.
- Invite ideas from council members, recording them on a chalkboard or flipchart.
- Accept all ideas without either positive or negative comment.
- Encourage quantity, not quality – the more ideas the better.
- Modify and combine ideas.
- Finally, ask school council members to rank the ideas they feel are the best.

Round table. This process is similar to brainstorming, but with the group subdivided into small groups of four to six people. Give each group a time limit. Record all ideas on flipcharts and report back to the main group after the time limit has been reached.

Brain writing. This is similar to a round table, but with more individual participation. Give index cards to each group and ask each group member to write down one idea on each card. The cards are then exchanged and new ideas or comments are added by other members of the group. A facilitator summarizes and groups the ideas and comments.

Methods for Facilitating Decision Making and Priority Setting

After ideas have been generated by one of the methods described above, the following strategies can be used to help the council make decisions and set priorities:

Pro/con analysis. In this process, participants develop possible solutions for an important issue that needs to be resolved, and focus on the advantages and disadvantages of the alternatives developed. It is best that members complete this process before a motion is put forward and the issue is voted on or before members try to reach a decision by consensus.

Voting. After all ideas have been listed, each member votes on what he or she considers the three or four best ideas by putting a coloured sticker or a coloured check mark beside the ideas he or she thinks are best. The number of stickers or check marks beside each idea will determine the ranking (i.e., the idea with the most stickers beside it is first, etc.). The recorder then lists the ideas in the order of their ranking.

Value voting. This method is useful for obtaining feedback when time is limited. The chair/co-chairs ask each member to take a position on each idea (e.g., strongly agree, agree, or strongly disagree). Each position category is then tallied to arrive at a direction, rather than a decision.

Multi-voting. This variation of brainstorming allows the group to narrow down the number of ideas presented. After brainstorming, the ideas are numbered and similar ideas are combined. Each member then writes down the numbers of those that he or she feels should be discussed. No more than one-quarter of the ideas on the master list should be chosen. After getting feedback from members, those ideas in which few were interested are eliminated and the remaining ideas are kept for further discussion.

The Role of the Chair

The chair's role in maximizing the effectiveness of meetings is crucial. Much has already been said, but here are some additional tips for those who are chairing council meetings:

- Start and end each meeting on time.
- Keep opening remarks welcoming but brief. Introduce any guests, being sure to include all those presenting agenda items.
- Review the agenda with council members. Outline what is to be accomplished. Keep to the agenda and the timelines. If new business items are raised that cannot be properly discussed at the meeting because of time constraints, record them on chart paper and carry them forward as agenda items for the next meeting.
- Maintain order and focus on priorities.
- Ensure that minutes of each meeting are kept.
- Allow for both individual and small-group input during discussion of agenda items.
- Try to remain neutral and provide alternative ways to solve problems or make decisions.
- Encourage decision making through consensus. If desired, use rules of order to formalize decisions made through consensus.
- Check that all council members have the same understanding of any decisions. At the end of each meeting, summarize the meeting, reviewing key actions and decisions.
- Remind members of or establish the time, date, and location of the next meeting and note any items of new business to be included in that meeting's agenda.
- Occasionally, assess the effectiveness of a meeting. Use the information to improve future council meetings.

The checklist provided on page 8.13 can help chairs/co-chairs assess their communication skills and strengths, as well as highlight the areas that could be improved. (This checklist could also be used by other council members who might want to assess their own communication skills and strengths.)

Notes

1. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 12(5).
2. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 12(4).
3. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, sections 16(1) and (2).
4. Adapted from Stephanie Hirsh and Mike Murphy, *School Improvement Planning Manual* (Oxford, Ohio: The National Staff Development Council, 1992), p. 23.
5. Adapted from Alberta Education, *School Councils Handbook* (Edmonton, Alta.: Alberta Education, 1996).
6. Adapted from Alberta Education, *School Councils Handbook*.

ASSESSING THE COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND STRENGTHS OF THE CHAIR/CO-CHAIRS

	Yes	No	Sometimes
• I invite feedback from others to determine that what I have said is understood.	☐	☐	☐
• I try to understand exactly what I want to say before I speak or write.	☐	☐	☐
• I state my message clearly.	☐	☐	☐
• I make sure my actions are consistent with my words.	☐	☐	☐
• I consider the overtones of my message as well as the intended meaning.	☐	☐	☐
• I try to be aware of the attitudes and beliefs of those with whom I am communicating.	☐	☐	☐
• I am honest in what I say to others.	☐	☐	☐
• I listen carefully to what others have to say.	☐	☐	☐
• I recognize that what I am saying may not always be understood.	☐	☐	☐
• I avoid phrases that may be offensive.	☐	☐	☐
• I avoid speaking down to or over the heads of others.	☐	☐	☐
• I avoid using jargon that others may not understand.	☐	☐	☐
• I tolerate disagreement.	☐	☐	☐
• I try to encourage the expression of all points of view, particularly from those who haven't spoken.	☐	☐	☐
• I can be persuaded by the views of others.	☐	☐	☐
• I participate in discussions without dominating them.	☐	☐	☐
• I accept criticism of my work.	☐	☐	☐
• I express criticism freely and honestly.	☐	☐	☐
• I express commendation freely and honestly.	☐	☐	☐
• I try to phrase my messages in a positive way.	☐	☐	☐

Communication

Establishing Channels of Communication

Communication Is the Key

Communication is the key to ensuring strong partnerships and a successful school council. It is crucial to achieving increased involvement and greater influence for parents in their children's education. School councils must have sound methods of communicating with the school principal, with the school board, with parents, and with each other. The school council's communication strategy should also include an effective method of communicating with the school community on a regular basis. This process should in time become routine.

Many channels of communication are required to ensure that your school council functions effectively. The following sections offer advice about using these channels.

Chair/Co-Chairs and School Council Members

Chairs/co-chairs must ensure that council members are accessible to each other. Council members with questions, issues, or simply agenda items to add to the next meeting's agenda will need to know how to contact the chair. It is a good idea to develop a list of contact numbers, addresses, and e-mail addresses for all council members at the beginning of the year and to distribute the list to all members.

The chair/co-chairs of your school council should remember to thank council members frequently. All school council members offer their time and expertise as volunteers on council, time that is very precious. Some go out of their way to do simple things such as arranging for special refreshments or coming early to ensure that the room and all the necessary equipment are ready. Some council members may spend hours working on committees. It is important to recognize and applaud their efforts, big and small, on a regular basis so that they will know that they are valued and will continue to take pride in the work they do. This kind of acknowledgement helps to sustain council members' involvement and provides for continuing support.

Chair/Co-Chairs and the Principal

The need to develop a good working relationship between the chair/co-chairs and the principal at the beginning of the year cannot be stressed enough. Trust, respect, and open communication are the nucleus for an effective partnership and, ultimately, an effective school council. To accomplish this, the chair/co-chairs and the principal must establish an effective way to communicate outside of regular meetings. This includes such things as how each would like to receive information (e.g., by maintaining in-boxes in the school office for materials related to the council, by using e-mail). It may also mean establishing a procedure for what is to happen when an urgent issue arises.

Your Council and the School Community

It is essential that a channel of communication is established between your school council and the school community. This is part of the school council's mandate, and it is crucial to effective school council operations.

Your Council and Other School Councils in Your Area

Periodically networking with other school councils can be extremely beneficial. Networking can occur in a variety of ways – for example, through meetings, teleconferencing, or e-mail – and can involve other school councils in your area, all the school councils in your board, or all the school councils in a regional organization of councils. Networking gives councils the opportunity to share best practices; to learn what is new locally, regionally, and provincially; to feel supported and connected to a larger community; and to have a stronger voice at the board level or the provincial level.

Your school council should determine early in the school year what kinds of networking opportunities exist. If there are no such opportunities, the chair of your council may wish to write to school council chairs in the area, the board, or the region, outlining the goals of your council and expressing your council's wish to exchange information. The chair can take the lead in establishing a method for exchanging information and creating an opportunity to meet and share ideas. Your council may wish to invite a speaker or panel to provide training or expert information on topics that would be of interest to the whole group. This could also be used as an opportunity to plan strategies and activities that would benefit the whole group.

Sharing information regularly with school councils in your area will keep information flowing among the councils, and all councils will benefit from this flow of information. The responsibility of communicating regularly could be assigned to one school council member, who would then share the information with the rest of the council.

Your Council and the Board

Establishing a good relationship with the board is important. If you have any questions about the board's initiatives, school council policies and procedures, or policies affecting students' success, the first place to seek clarification is with the principal of your school. You may also call your board's general-inquiries phone number. Some boards have designated a superintendent to liaise with school councils. Most boards now have websites where news, notices, and other educational data are available. Bookmark your board's website to make frequent referencing and updating easier. Your school council might, from time to time, consider inviting members of senior administration and/or trustees to obtain specific information that might be relevant to your discussions. While senior administration and/or trustees have an open invitation to council meetings, their regular attendance should not be expected.

Developing a Communication Plan

One of your council's first tasks might be to develop a communication plan. To do so, you should consider the following:

- the audience with whom you need to communicate
- issues requiring broad school-community consultation
- the various communication strategies and processes that you can use
- individuals responsible for developing the plan
- timelines
- ways of dealing with feedback from the community

Throughout the year, there will be many opportunities for your school council to assume a significant public profile in the school and in the school community, and it is important that you make the most of those events. Opportunities may take the form of:

- setting up a school council information table on parent-teacher interview nights;
- sending students home with a newsletter that could include the council's meeting minutes;

- posting the council's meeting minutes on the school's website;
- hosting special events that bring the school community into the school;
- making use of regular mailings, such as the mailing of report cards, to include a school council update, a list of the council's activities for the year, or the school council's meeting minutes;
- having the chair/co-chairs speak at various school functions;
- making personal contact with parents by phone or at special meetings;
- setting up a school council display in the main foyer of the school;
- making use of public service announcements and other forms of free radio, TV, and newspaper advertising;
- posting notices in local churches and community halls.

In choosing communication strategies, your council should consider their effectiveness and appropriateness for parents from diverse backgrounds and for the audiences within your community. For example, to assess the audience you wish to reach, you might begin by asking questions like the following:

- Who needs to know this? Which groups or communities need to be informed?
- With whom are we communicating already?
- Is the school reaching everyone it should?
- What organizations should we be reaching?

Next, you might decide exactly what you wish to communicate by asking questions such as the following:

- What does the audience need to know?
- What have we communicated up until now?
- Is the information we now wish to communicate appropriate for the audience?

Finally, you might determine how to deliver the messages you wish to communicate to your intended audience by asking questions such as the following:

- What is the best way and time to communicate?
- How are we currently exchanging information with the different groups in the school community?
- How can we assess the effectiveness of our current communication strategies?
- What communication efforts are working? Are not working?
- Are the messages designed to suit different audiences?
- Do we promote two-way communication?
- How will we know that the message has been received?

The public learns about schools through the following sources:

- local newspapers
- conversations with friends and neighbours
- radio, television, or the Internet
- school newsletters
- conversations with students
- service clubs and business associations
- personal friendships with educators in the district
- personal visits to schools

Your council might want to consider including the following in your communication plan:

- any successful programs and practices that your school and parent group provide to involve families in their children's education
- ways of obtaining feedback from parents and staff on current practices that might be improved or on practices that are to be introduced
- specific strategies to involve families who do not participate in any of the programs provided
- two to four priorities of the current year's council
- ways of assessing the effectiveness of your council's communication strategies and revising the communication plan for the following year

Communication Strategies for Community Outreach

Community outreach is a whole-school activity. It must involve all staff members, students, and school council members and should become a regular part of the school's business. The purpose of community outreach is to facilitate the continuous involvement of parents and community representatives in the school. Before determining which outreach strategies to use, you and other council members might consider the activities in which you would like to involve parents and community members, as well as the activities in which these people might be interested.

Your school community will include a number of diverse groups: those who share common geographical, racial, ethnocultural, historic, religious, linguistic, or life backgrounds or experiences; others who share a particular challenge; and still others who share business, organizational, or institutional experiences. All these people and groups of people have something to contribute to the school, and to be successful, your council should take advantage of the experience, knowledge, and skills of all of them.

It is expected that your council will work closely with the school to establish and maintain strong communication links with these diverse groups and to encourage their involvement in both the school council and the school itself. This section of the guide provides some suggestions for accomplishing this.

The following are some of the ways your council can communicate with the diverse groups that make up your community:

- distributing newsletters and flyers to them
- inviting them to visit the school
- consulting them on community issues and needs
- holding meetings of the school council or school events in locations other than the school, such as in various recreation and cultural centres
- using local translators for meetings
- advertising regularly in appropriate languages in local newspapers and publications and on local ethno-specific radio and television programs
- encouraging leaders of diverse racial and ethnocultural groups to share information about the school council with members of their communities and to promote the involvement of parents in the school
- using voice mail to record messages about council activities in appropriate languages
- avoiding scheduling meetings on religious holidays
- designating council members to work with specific organizations or networks

Here are a few suggestions to help make your council's outreach successful:

- Create an outreach committee, made up of members who represent the diverse groups within your community. Hold sessions with parents and other community representatives to brainstorm ideas for reaching others. Obtain specific information regarding outreach from everyone.
- Treat every parent and community representative with respect, trust, and courtesy.
- Make sure that there is a formal mechanism in place that lets parents and community representatives communicate what they want, need, like, and dislike throughout the year. Be sure to follow up on any concerns they raise.
- Offer information, workshops, and support for parents to help them learn more about what goes on in the school and how they can contribute to what their children are learning at school, both academically and socially. Include parents in pertinent planning sessions.
- Invite community leaders to school events.
- Use teachers, parents, and council members to actively recruit other parents to become involved in the school.

Communication Tips for Elementary Schools

Generally speaking, getting information home to parents in an elementary school community can be achieved fairly easily, as children in these grades are usually quite dutiful about bringing information home.

- Include information in the school's monthly calendar and in the school newsletter that goes home on a regular basis.
- Use space on the school's website to highlight activities and accomplishments of the council and to promote parental involvement.
- Organize a telephone tree.
- If possible, and with permission, collect e-mail addresses from parents and set up distribution lists.
- Host information sessions.
- Always remember to accommodate working parents/guardians when setting up in-school meetings.
- Advertise in appropriate and effective locations or mediums.
- Make use of free public service announcements.

Communication Tips for Secondary Schools

Many of the strategies mentioned above also work for secondary schools, although high school students may not be as reliable as younger students in bringing information home. However, regular communication with the school community is as important for secondary schools as it is for elementary schools. If your school council wants to ensure good communication, it should think creatively about ways of disseminating information. For example, if your council wants to get a newsletter home, find out when the principal is doing a mailing to the school community, and have a newsletter prepared for inclusion with the mailing. This incurs no extra cost, and it ensures that information is getting home to parents. Secondary school councils may, however, wish to ensure that they can afford to send information home in the mail throughout the year, including notices of school council meetings and previous minutes.

Sharing Information Across the Province

The Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education is interested in what school councils have to say. The ministry also makes available a broad range of information on provincial policies and initiatives. Communication can take place in a variety of ways.

- For general inquiries, call toll-free in Ontario at 1-800-387-5514. In the Toronto area, call 416-325-2929 or fax the ministry at 416-325-6348.
- The ministry's telecommunication device for the deaf is available by dialling 1-800-263-2892.
- The ministry's mailing address is Correspondence and Public Inquiries Unit, 14th Floor, Mowat Block, 900 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2.
- The ministry's e-mail address is info@edu.gov.on.ca.
- The ministry has a bilingual website – www.edu.gov.on.ca – which has a searchable database and links to other websites involved with, and committed to, education.
- There are six ministry field services branches: Barrie, London, North Bay/Sudbury, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, and Toronto (see map on page 9.6). School councils can contact the office nearest them:
  - Barrie: (705) 725-7627 or toll-free at 1-800-471-0713
  - London: (519) 776-1440 or toll-free at 1-800-265-4221
  - Ottawa: (613) 225-9210 or toll-free at 1-800-267-1067
  - North Bay/Sudbury: (705) 474-7210 or toll-free at 1-800-461-9570
  - Thunder Bay: (807) 475-1571 or toll-free at 1-800-465-5020
  - Toronto: (416) 325-4190 or toll-free at 1-800-268-5755

Hudson Bay
James Bay
THUNDER BAY DISTRICT
Lake Superior
N
NORTH BAY-SUDBURY DISTRICT
Lake Huron
BARRIE DISTRICT
OTTAWA DISTRICT
TORONTO DISTRICT
Lake Ontario
Lake Michigan
LONDON DISTRICT
Lake Erie
District Office Boundaries
Barrie District
London District
North Bay-Sudbury District
Ottawa District
Thunder Bay District
Toronto District
Ontario

The Ontario Parent Council Website

The Ontario Parent Council (OPC) maintains a website at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org to communicate with parents of elementary and secondary school students and with school council members in Ontario.

On the website you can find information about the OPC, information on today's education issues, information about school councils and their important role at your child's school, answers to questions parents often ask, links to resources related to your child's education, and information about the ways in which you can voice your views and concerns.

The OPC welcomes the ideas of parents and school councils. To locate the OPC member nearest you, visit the OPC website at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org. You can contact the council by phone at 1-800-361-6483, by fax at 416-314-0425, or by e-mail at opc@edu.gov.on.ca. The OPC's mailing address is: Ontario Parent Council, 2 Carlton Street, Suite 1511, Toronto ON M5B 1J3.

Accountability

Annual Reports

At the end of its term, your school council must prepare and submit a written report to the school and to the board, outlining the council's goals, activities, and achievements, including any fund-raising activities.[1] The principal, on behalf of the school council, must ensure that a copy of this annual report is provided to every parent who has a child enrolled in the school.

Provided below are two sample annual report formats. Sample 1 indicates the minimum information that should be provided in an annual report. Sample 2 illustrates a more detailed approach.

Sample Annual Report Formats: Sample 1

ANNUAL REPORT
[*Name of School*]
[*Date of Submission*]

1. Begin with a warm opening statement addressed to parents and the school community, including an open invitation to attend all school council meetings.

2. List the names and positions (e.g., council chair, secretary) of and the group represented by (e.g., parents, students, teaching/non-teaching staff, the community) all current school council members.

3. Name, identify, and acknowledge the efforts and commitment of outgoing school council members from the previous year.

4. List the dates of the previous year's school council meetings, as well as any available information on upcoming meetings.

5. Include a financial statement if the school council held any fund-raising events. (See the next section.)

[*Name of School*] Council

Annual Report
for the
[*insert year*] School Year

Dear Parents and School Community:

Welcome back! We hope you had a safe and happy summer. The [*name of school*] School Council had a very rewarding [*insert year*]. The school council held [*number*] meetings on [*list dates*] and worked on various issues during the year including [*insert list*]. These meetings were open to the public to encourage input from parents and other members of the school community.

The purpose of the school council is to help improve student achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents. School councils are advisory organizations. A school council's primary means of achieving its purpose is by making recommendations to the principal of the school and the school board. Boards and principals are responsible for considering the recommendations made by each school council and for advising the council(s) of the actions taken in response to the recommendations. Accordingly, included with this report is a summary of the advice that the school council provided to the principal and to the school board in [*insert year*], as well as the responses from the principal and school board on how this advice was taken into account in decision making [*attach summary of advice and responses*] .

Additional achievements of the school council in [*insert year*] included the following: [*insert list*]. Fund-raising activities were also conducted, and the proceeds were used to fund projects in accordance with school board policies. These fund-raising activities are identified in the attached financial summary entitled "Sources and Uses of Project Funds". Another summary of financial activity related to the school council's administrative activities, entitled "Sources and Uses of Operating Funds", is also attached. Minutes of meetings held and financial records are available for public inspection at the school office.

We wish to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the many individuals who volunteered their time to contribute to the success of the school council last year. Special thanks are due to the following members of the [*insert year*] school council: [*provide list*]. Finally, we would like to wish the best of luck to candidates in the September [*insert year*] school council elections. Issues that we foresee as being important matters for the consideration of the new school council following the September [*insert year*] elections include [*insert list*].

Sincerely yours,

[*insert the name of the chair or co-chairs*]

Chair
[*insert date*]

Financial Statements

In the following two sample financial statements, "project funds" refers to fund-raising done for specific projects; "operating funds" refers to the ongoing operation expenses of the council.

Note: School councils shall not engage in fund-raising activities unless the activities are conducted in accordance with applicable policies established by the board.[2]

Sample Financial Statements: Sample 1

The [*name of school council*]
Sources and Uses of Project Funds for the Year Ended August 31, 2002

Cash on hand for projects at the beginning of the period (September 1, 2001)	$227.64
Add revenues: Net funds raised (see Analysis 1 below)	717.11
	944.75
Subtract expenditures: Project expenditures (see Analysis 2 below)	– 746.00
Project cash on hand at the end of the period (August 31, 2002)	$198.75

Analysis 1: Net Funds Raised

Activity	Expenditure	Receipts	Net Proceeds
Candy bars	$137.48	$340.00	$202.52
Milk	383.16	510.00	126.84
Fun Run	8.73	65.00	56.27
Raffle	86.02	417.50	331.48
Totals	**$615.39**	**$1,332.50**	**$717.11**

Analysis 2: Project Expenditures

Project	Expenditure
Instrument repair (recorders)	$300.00
CDs for music program	296.00
Bus subsidy for Grade 6	150.00
Total	**$746.00**

The [*name of school council*]
Sources and Uses of Operating Funds for the Year Ended August 31, 2002

Operating cash on hand at the beginning of the period (September 1, 2001)		**$147.12**
Add allocation from board		**500.00**
		647.12
Subtract operating expenditures (see breakdown below)		
Expenditures		
Postage	$291.27	
Photocopies	176.63	
Miscellaneous	42.92	
Total		**510.82**
Operating cash on hand at the end of the period (August 31, 2002)		**$136.30**

Notes

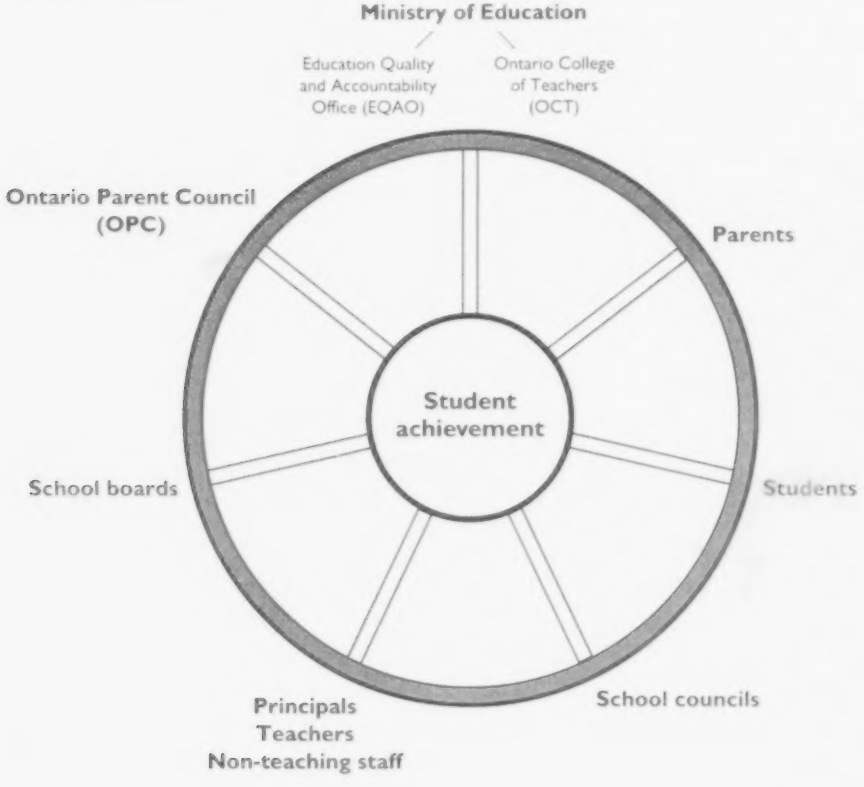
1. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, section 24.
2. See Ontario Regulation 612/00, sections 22(2) and (3).

About Ontario's Education System

In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility. Each province has a statute (or statutes) outlining the duties to be carried out by the chief official responsible for education. In Ontario, that chief official is the Minister of Education and the statute is the Education Act. Under this act there are a number of regulations that define in more detail the act's general provisions and the duties and responsibilities that are delegated by the province to other bodies and officials such as school boards, principals, teachers, parents, students, and school councils.

Each of the partners described in this section is an important link in Ontario's education system and together they form a connected chain. All partners must work together to ensure that a quality education system is available for all children.

PARTNERS IN EDUCATION



The Minister of Education

The Minister of Education is appointed by the Premier and represents the interests of the ministry at the provincial cabinet. The Minister determines the general direction for education policy in Ontario. With the assistance of the Ministry of Education, the Minister also administers the Education Act and any regulations that concern education. The following list identifies some of the Minister's responsibilities under the Education Act:

- setting policies and guidelines for curriculum and the assessment of students' academic achievement
- setting policies and guidelines for school trustees, directors of education, principals, and other school board officials
- setting requirements for student diplomas and certificates
- granting letters of permission authorizing boards to employ persons as teachers who are not members of the Ontario College of Teachers
- ensuring that special education programs and services are available to Ontario's exceptional children
- preparing lists of approved textbooks and other learning materials
- setting the length of the school year

The ministry ensures that all of the partners in Ontario's education system work together to build a system focused on quality and student achievement. It provides training and support, answers public inquiries, provides information to each of the partners in Ontario's education system and to the general public, and oversees policy development and implementation. The ministry has six district offices to assist Ontario's school boards, schools, and students. These are located in Barrie, London, North Bay/Sudbury, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, and Toronto.

Education in Ontario has recently undergone significant renewal and change. The key elements are:

- a new, province-wide curriculum that sets clear, rigorous, and consistent standards for what students are expected to learn from year to year;
- province-wide student testing and participation in national and international assessments;
- a new, four-year high school program that gives students choices both in courses and in ways of learning to ensure that they gain relevant skills and expertise;
- a new, standard report card that gives parents clear and consistent information about their children's progress;
- a new, student-focused approach to funding;
- a new, province-wide code of conduct;
- a planned teacher-testing program;
- strengthened school councils that give parents a more meaningful role in their children's education;
- a streamlined system for governing Ontario's French-language and English-language public and Catholic systems.

The Education Quality and Accountability Office

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was established by the Ontario government in 1996 to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education. EQAO develops and implements provincial testing (assessment) programs for elementary and secondary school students and also coordinates Ontario's participation in national and international assessments.

The EQAO is responsible for:

- developing and administering tests to evaluate the achievement of Ontario elementary and secondary school students;
- reporting test results to the Minister and to the public;
- providing recommendations to improve test results in the future.

The establishment of the EQAO was based on a recommendation made by the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning in 1995. The commission consulted extensively with educators, parents, other taxpayers, and students and concluded that province-wide assessments would help to address public demands for excellence and accountability in the publicly funded school system.

The EQAO's assessments provide information that teachers and parents can use to improve learning for all students. They also provide information that parents, educators, policy makers, and members of the public can use to monitor the effectiveness of the education system over time. In addition, the EQAO works to ensure that this information is used to bring about improvement for individual students and for the education system as a whole.

For more information about the EQAO, visit their website at www.eqao.com.

The Ontario College of Teachers

The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) is a college of professionals with authority to license, govern, and regulate the teaching profession in Ontario. The college was established by the provincial government in September 1996. Its primary functions are to set out clear standards of practice, ensure sound professional learning goals, and coordinate and monitor ongoing accredited professional learning for teachers.

The college is responsible for:

- setting requirements for teaching certificates and maintaining a provincial register of teachers;
- setting standards for teacher training programs at Ontario universities and monitoring the training programs to ensure that they meet the standards;
- developing codes of conduct for teachers;
- investigating complaints against teachers and making decisions about teacher discipline and fitness to practice.

For more information on the OCT, visit the college's website at www.oct.on.ca.

The Ontario Parent Council

Established in 1993, the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) is a provincial agency that provides advice to the Minister of Education from a parental perspective regarding elementary and secondary school education. The OPC also provides advice about ways to increase the involvement of parents in the education of their children. The OPC is committed to providing parents across Ontario with comprehensive, up-to-date information on various aspects of education through its website, at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org (see "The Ontario Parent Council Website" in Section 9: Communication).

The OPC is composed of twenty members appointed by the Minister of Education. Individuals seeking appointment must be parents or guardians of students enrolled in elementary or secondary schools in Ontario. Members of the council are appointed for a term of two years and may be reappointed for further terms, although no person can be appointed for three or more consecutive terms.

Six members are selected from parents nominated by school councils at regional forums. One member is recommended by each of three provincial parents' organizations: the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, and Parents Partenaires en Éducation. The Minister appoints eleven other parent members from across the province, including the chair.

For more information about the OPC, visit the OPC's website at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org.

School Boards

While the Minister of Education establishes general policy for schools, Ontario's school boards operate the province's publicly funded schools. It is each board's responsibility to administer the funding it receives from the province for its schools and to ensure that standards established by the ministry are achieved by students in its jurisdiction. School boards are the oldest form of publicly elected government in Ontario. As elected members of the

school board, trustees represent the local community, providing a link between voters and the education system.

Ontario's seventy-two district school boards are made up of thirty-one English-language public boards, twenty-nine English-language Catholic boards, four French-language public boards, and eight French-language Catholic boards. A small number of special types of Ontario schools, such as schools in hospitals and treatment facilities and schools in remote and sparsely populated regions, are operated by "school authorities", which take the place of school boards.

As managers of Ontario's schools, board officials, led by the Director of Education at each board and including supervisory officers, provide management and support for the schools in the board and play a major role in implementing ministry and board policies and decisions.

School boards are responsible for:

- determining the number, size, and location of schools;
- building, equipping, and furnishing schools;
- providing education programs that meet the needs of the school community, including needs for special education;
- the prudent management of the funds allocated by the province to support all board activities, including education programs for elementary and secondary school students, and the building and maintenance of schools;
- preparing an annual budget;
- supervising the operation of schools and their teaching programs;
- establishing a school council at each school;
- hiring teachers and other staff;
- helping teachers improve their teaching practices;
- teacher performance;
- approving schools' textbook and learning materials from the approved Ministry of Education list;
- enforcing the student attendance provisions of the Education Act;
- ensuring that schools abide by the Education Act and its regulations;
- establishing and implementing the board's code of conduct;
- negotiating and administering collective agreements.

School boards may also provide transportation for students to and from school and operate summer and evening classes.

Principals

Principals are responsible for the organization and management of individual schools, including the management of the budget assigned to the school by the school board. They are also responsible for the quality of instruction at their schools and for student discipline. Depending on the size of the school, the school board may also assign one or more vice-principals to a school to help the principal with his or her work.

The principal is the head teacher in the school and in addition to any teaching duties, each principal is responsible for:

- determining the organization of the school and ensuring ongoing maintenance of the school buildings;
- administering the school's budget;
- supervising the instruction in the school;
- evaluating the performance of teachers;
- admitting and placing students;
- maintaining student records;
- ensuring that report cards are sent to parents;
- attending every meeting of the school council, acting as a resource person for the council, considering council recommendations, and reporting back on actions taken (or delegating those responsibilities to a vice-principal);

- developing a school safe-arrival program (in the case of elementary schools) with the help of the school council, parents, and the community;
- ensuring student supervision and school discipline;
- assigning teachers to classes and assisting and supervising them;
- making recommendations to the school board on the appointment, promotion, demotion, and dismissal of teachers;
- selecting textbooks and other learning materials from the approved Ministry of Education list.

Teachers

Teachers are usually the most visible partners in the education system and every parent knows what a difference a good teacher makes to his or her child's education. Under the Education Act and its regulations, teachers are responsible for:

- the effective instruction, training, and evaluation of the progress of students;
- reporting to the principal on the progress of students, on request;
- supervising students' behaviour and maintaining classroom discipline;
- demonstrating good citizenship and respect for all groups of people;
- acting as teacher-advisers for students in Grades 7–12 (e.g., helping students complete their annual education plans and monitoring their performance at school and their progress towards their career goals);
- preparing any teaching plans and outlines required by the principal and the appropriate supervisory officer and submitting the plans and outlines to the principal or the appropriate supervisory officer, as the case may be, on request;
- assisting the principal in maintaining close cooperation with the community;
- ensuring that all reasonable safety procedures are carried out in courses and activities.

Students

The Ontario Code of Conduct states that students are to be treated with respect and dignity, and that in return, they must demonstrate respect and responsibility by:

- coming to school prepared, on time, and ready to learn;
- showing respect for themselves, for others, and for those in authority;
- refraining from bringing anything to school that may compromise the safety of others;
- following the established rules and taking responsibility for their own actions.

Parents

Parents play the first and most important role in their children's education and are key partners in building a quality education system. For many years, parents have participated in their children's education through home and school associations, parent-teacher associations, and other parent groups. Now, the regulation on school councils secures a formal route through which parents can provide meaningful input into the education of their children.

Parental involvement in education takes many forms outside participation in a formal organization. By helping their children with homework, asking them about the day's events, communicating with their teachers, expressing interest and concern, and providing guidance, parents become the primary factors contributing to their children's success. Parents can also contribute to and enhance their children's learning by becoming involved in the school community through the school council – by serving on the council or on one of its various committees, or by performing other volunteer roles.

Under the Education Act, parents are responsible for ensuring that their children attend school. Attendance is compulsory between the ages of six and sixteen.

School Councils

School councils are playing an increasingly important role in Ontario's education system. As described in this guide, the role of school councils is to ensure that parents have an active voice in their children's education. Ontario Regulation 612/00 is intended to define clearly the work of school councils and affirm the participation of parents in the education system. The specific roles and responsibilities of school councils are outlined in detail in the preceding pages. The addition of school councils to the chain of partners in Ontario's education system will result in a more responsive system that ensures that parents' voices are heard.

Appendix 1: The Regulations

Ontario Regulation 612/00

Education Act
ONTARIO REGULATION 612/00
No Amendments
SCHOOL COUNCILS

This is the English version of a bilingual regulation.

Interpretation

1. (1) In this Regulation,

"meeting" does not include a training session or other event where a school council does not discuss or decide matters that it has authority to decide; ("réunion")

"parent" includes a guardian as defined in section 1 of the Act; ("père ou mère")

"parent member" means a member of a school council who is elected to the council in accordance with section 4 or who fills a vacancy created when a parent member ceases to hold office. ("père ou mère membre")

(2) In the case of a school that is established primarily for adults, a reference in this Regulation to a parent or to a parent of a pupil shall be deemed, with necessary modifications, to be a reference to a pupil who is enrolled in the school.

Purpose

2. (1) The purpose of school councils is, through the active participation of parents, to improve pupil achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents.

(2) A school council's primary means of achieving its purpose is by making recommendations in accordance with this Regulation to the principal of the school and the board that established the council.

Composition

3. (1) A school council for a school shall be composed of the following people:

1. The number of parent members determined under subsection (2).
2. The principal of the school.
3. One teacher who is employed at the school, other than the principal or vice-principal, elected in accordance with section 5.
4. One person who is employed at the school, other than the principal, vice-principal or any other teacher, elected in accordance with section 5.
5. In the case of a school with one or more secondary school grades,
   i. one pupil enrolled in the school who is appointed by the student council, if the school has a student council, or
   ii. one pupil enrolled in the school who is elected in accordance with section 5, if the school does not have a student council.
6. In the case of a school with no secondary school grades, one pupil enrolled in the school who is appointed by the principal of the school, if the principal determines, after consulting the other members of the school council, that the council should include a pupil.
7. Subject to subsection (3), one community representative appointed by the other members of the council.

8. One person appointed by an association that is a member of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education or Parents Partenaires en Éducation, if the association that is a member of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education or Parent Partenaires en Education is established in respect of the school.

(2) For the purposes of paragraph 1 of subsection (1), the number of parent members shall be determined as follows:

1. If the school council has a by-law that specifies the number of parent members, the number specified in the by-law.
2. If the school council does not have a by-law that specifies the number of parent members, the number specified by the board that established the council.

(3) A school council may specify by by-law that the council shall include two or more community representatives, appointed by the other members of the council.

(4) In specifying numbers under subsections (2) and (3), the board or the school council, as the case may be, shall ensure that parent members constitute a majority of the members of the school council.

(5) A person who is employed by the board that established a school council cannot be appointed as a community representative on the council unless,

(a) he or she is not employed at the school; and
(b) the other members of the school council are informed of the person's employment before the appointment.

(6) A member of a board cannot be a member of a school council established by the board.

(7) Paragraphs 5 and 6 of subsection (1) do not apply in respect of a school that is established primarily for adults.

Election of Parent Members

4. (1) A person is qualified to be a parent member of a school council if he or she is a parent of a pupil who is enrolled in the school.

(2) Despite subsection (1), a person is not qualified to be a parent member of a school council if,

(a) he or she is employed at the school; or
(b) he or she is not employed at the school but is employed elsewhere by the board that established the council, unless he or she takes reasonable steps to inform people qualified to vote in the election of parent members of that employment.

(3) A person is qualified to vote in an election of parent members of a school council if he or she is a parent of a pupil who is enrolled in the school.

(4) An election of parent members of a school council shall be held during the first 30 days of each school year, on a date that is fixed by the chair or co-chairs of the school council after consulting with the principal of the school.

(5) Despite subsection (4), if a new school is established, the first election of parent members to the school council shall be held during the first 30 days of the school year, on a date that is fixed by the board that established the school council.

(6) The principal of a school shall, at least 14 days before the date of the election of parent members, on behalf of the school council, give written notice of the date, time and location of the election to every parent of a pupil who, on the date the notice is given, is enrolled in the school.

(7) The notice required by subsection (6) may be given by,

(a) giving the notice to the parent's child for delivery to his or her parent; and
(b) posting the notice in the school in a location that is accessible to parents.

(8) The election of parent members shall be by secret ballot.

Other Elections

5. (1) The elections of members of school councils referred to in paragraph 3, paragraph 4 and subparagraph 5 ii of subsection 3 (1) shall be held during the first 30 days of each school year.

(2) A person is qualified to vote in an election of a member of a school council referred to in paragraph 3 of subsection 3 (1) if he or she is a teacher, other than the principal or vice-principal, who is employed at the school.

(3) A person is qualified to vote in an election of a member of a school council referred to in paragraph 4 of subsection 3 (1) if he or she is a person, other than the principal, vice-principal or any other teacher, who is employed at the school.

(4) A person is qualified to vote in an election of a member of a school council referred to in subparagraph 5 ii of subsection 3 (1) if he or she is a pupil enrolled in the school.

Term of Office

6. (1) A person elected or appointed as a member of a school council holds office from the later of,

(a) the date he or she is elected or appointed; and
(b) the date of the first meeting of the school council after the elections held under sections 4 and 5 in the school year,

until the date of the first meeting of the school council after the elections held under sections 4 and 5 in the next school year.

(2) A member of a school council may be re-elected or reappointed, unless otherwise provided by the by-laws of the council.

Vacancies

7. (1) A vacancy in the membership of a school council shall be filled by election or appointment in accordance with the by-laws of the council.

(2) If an election is held to fill a vacancy in the membership of a school council, section 4 or 5, as the case may be, applies, with necessary modifications, to the election.

(3) A vacancy in the membership of a school council does not prevent the council from exercising its authority.

Officers

8. (1) A school council shall have a chair or, if the by-laws of the council so provide, two co-chairs.

(2) A chair or co-chair of a school council must be a parent member of the council, and shall be elected by the members of the council.

(3) A person who is employed by the board that established the council cannot be the chair or co-chair of the council.

(4) A school council may have such other officers as are provided for in the by-laws of the council.

(5) Subject to subsections (2) and (3), vacancies in the office of chair, co-chair or any other officer of a school council shall be filled in accordance with the by-laws of the council.

Collection of Information

9. (1) The Ministry may, for the purpose of consulting and communicating directly with members of school councils, collect the names, mailing addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of the chair or co-chairs of a school council and of the other members of the council.

(2) The Ministry may disclose information collected under subsection (1) to the Ontario Parent Council, which may use the information for the purpose of consulting and communicating directly with members of school councils.

Ministry Powers and Duties

10. (1) As part of its accountability to parents, the Ministry shall report annually to members of school councils on education in the province.

(2) The Ministry may,
(a) make other reports to members of school councils; and
(b) provide information to members of school councils respecting the roles and responsibilities of school councils.

Remuneration

11. (1) A person shall not receive any remuneration for serving as a member or officer of a school council.

(2) Every board shall establish policies respecting the reimbursement of members and officers of school councils established by the board.

(3) The board that established a school council shall reimburse members and officers of the council, in accordance with the policies referred to in subsection (2), for expenses they incur as members or officers of the council.

Meetings

12. (1) A school council shall meet at least four times during the school year.

(2) A school council shall meet within the first 35 days of the school year, after the elections held under sections 4 and 5, on a date fixed by the principal of the school.

(3) A meeting of a school council cannot be held unless,
(a) a majority of the current members of the council are present at the meeting; and
(b) a majority of the members of the council who are present at the meeting are parent members.

(4) All meetings of a school council shall be open to the public.

(5) A school council is entitled to hold its meetings at the school.

(6) All meetings of a school council shall be held at a location that is accessible to the public.

(7) The principal of a school shall, on behalf of the school council, give written notice of the dates, times and locations of the meetings of the council to every parent of a pupil who, on the date the notice is given, is enrolled in the school.

(8) The notice required by subsection (7) may be given by,

(a) giving the notice to the parent's child for delivery to his or her parent; and

(b) posting the notice in the school in a location that is accessible to parents.

Committees

13. (1) A school council may, in accordance with its by-laws, establish committees to make recommendations to the council.

(2) Every committee of a school council must include at least one parent member of the council.

(3) A committee of a school council may include persons who are not members of the council.

(4) Subsections 12 (4) to (8) apply, with necessary modifications, to committees of school councils.

Voting

14. (1) Subject to subsection (3), each member of a school council is entitled to one vote in votes taken by the council.

(2) Subject to subsection (3), each member of a committee of a school council is entitled to one vote in votes taken by the committee.

(3) The principal of the school is not entitled to vote in votes taken by the school council or by a committee of the school council.

By-laws

15. (1) A school council may make by-laws governing the conduct of its affairs.

(2) Every school council shall make the following by-laws:

1. A by-law that governs election procedures and the filling of vacancies in the membership of the school council.
2. A by-law that establishes rules respecting participation in school council proceedings in cases of conflict of interest.
3. A by-law that, in accordance with any applicable policies established by the board that established the council, establishes a conflict resolution process for internal school council disputes.

Minutes and Financial Records

16. (1) A school council shall keep minutes of all of its meetings and records of all of its financial transactions.

(2) The minutes and records shall be available at the school for examination without charge by any person.

(3) Subsections (1) and (2) do not apply to minutes and records that are more than four years old.

Incorporation

17. A school council shall not be incorporated.

Principal

18. (1) The principal of a school may delegate any of his or her powers or duties as a member of the school council, including any powers or duties under this Regulation, to a vice-principal of the school.

(2) In addition to his or her duties under this Regulation, the principal of a school shall perform the duties relating to school councils that are imposed on the principal by Regulation 298 of the Revised Regulations of Ontario, 1990 (Operation of Schools – General).

Consultation by Board

19. (1) In addition to its other obligations to solicit the views of school councils under the Act, every board shall solicit the views of the school councils established by the board with respect to the following matters:

1. The establishment or amendment of board policies and guidelines that relate to pupil achievement or to the accountability of the education system to parents, including,
   i. policies and guidelines established under subsection 302 (1) of the Act with respect to the conduct of persons in schools within the board's jurisdiction,
   ii. policies and guidelines established under subsection 302 (5) of the Act respecting appropriate dress for pupils in schools within the board's jurisdiction,
   iii. policies and guidelines respecting the allocation of funding by the board to school councils,
   iv. policies and guidelines respecting the fundraising activities of school councils,
   v. policies and guidelines respecting conflict resolution processes for internal school council disputes, and
   vi. policies and guidelines respecting reimbursement by the board of expenses incurred by members and officers of school councils.

2. The development of implementation plans for new education initiatives that relate to pupil achievement or to the accountability of the education system to parents, including,
   i. implementation plans for policies and guidelines established under subsection 302 (1) of the Act with respect to the conduct of persons in schools within the board's jurisdiction, and
   ii. implementation plans for policies and guidelines established under subsection 302 (5) of the Act respecting appropriate dress for pupils in schools within the board's jurisdiction.
3. Board action plans for improvement, based on the Education Quality and Accountability Office's reports on the results of tests of pupils, and the communication of those plans to the public.
4. The process and criteria applicable to the selection and placement of principals and vice-principals.

(2) Subsection (1) does not limit the matters on which a board may solicit the views of school councils.

Advisory Authority of School Councils

20. A school council may make recommendations to the principal of the school or to the board that established the council on any matter.

Duty of Board to Respond

21. The board that established a school council shall consider each recommendation made to the board by the council and shall advise the council of the action taken in response to the recommendation.

Fundraising

22. (1) Subject to subsection (2), a school council may engage in fundraising activities.

(2) A school council shall not engage in fundraising activities unless,
(a) the activities are conducted in accordance with any applicable policies established by the board; and
(b) the activities are to raise funds for a purpose approved by the board or authorized by any applicable policies established by the board.

(3) A school council shall ensure that the funds raised by it are used in accordance with any applicable policies established by the board.

Consultation with Parents

23. A school council shall consult with parents of pupils enrolled in the school about matters under consideration by the council.

Annual Report

24. (1) Every school council shall annually submit a written report on its activities to the principal of the school and to the board that established the council.

(2) If the school council engages in fundraising activities, the annual report shall include a report on those activities.

(3) The principal shall, on behalf of the school council, give a copy of the report to every parent of a pupil who, on the date the copy is given, is enrolled in the school.

(4) Subsection (3) may be complied with by,
(a) giving the report to the parent's child for delivery to his or her parent; and
(b) posting the report in the school in a location that is accessible to parents.

Transition

25. Every school council established by a board before this Regulation comes into force is continued.

26. (1) Sections 3, 4 and 5 do not apply until September 1, 2001.

(2) Until the date of the first meeting of a school council after the first election held under section 4 after September 1, 2001, the references in subsection 8 (2), clause 12 (3) (b) and subsection 13 (2) to a parent member shall be deemed to be references to a member of the school council who is a parent of a pupil enrolled in the school.

Excerpts from Regulation 298

Education Act
REVISED REGULATIONS OF ONTARIO
REGULATION 298
Amended to O. Reg. 613/00
OPERATION OF SCHOOLS – GENERAL

This is the English version of a bilingual regulation.

Duties of Principals

11. (1) The principal of a school, subject to the authority of the appropriate supervisory officer, is in charge of,

(a) the instruction and the discipline of pupils in the school; and

(b) the organization and management of the school.

(2) Where two or more schools operated by a board jointly occupy or use in common a school building or school grounds, the board shall designate which principal has authority over those parts of the building or grounds that the schools occupy or use in common.

(3) In addition to the duties under the Act and those assigned by the board, the principal of a school shall, except where the principal has arranged otherwise under subsection 26 (3),

(a) supervise the instruction in the school and advise and assist any teacher in co-operation with the teacher in charge of an organizational unit or program;

(b) assign duties to vice-principals and to teachers in charge of organizational units or programs;

(c) retain on file up-to-date copies of outlines of all courses of study that are taught in the school;

(d) upon request, make outlines of courses of study available for examination to a resident pupil of the board and to the parent of the pupil, where the pupil is a minor;

(e) provide for the supervision of pupils during the period of time during each school day when the school buildings and playgrounds are open to pupils;

(f) provide for the supervision of and the conducting of any school activity authorized by the board;

(g) where performance appraisals of members of the teaching staff are required under a collective agreement or a policy of the board, despite anything to the contrary in such collective agreement or board policy, conduct performance appraisals of members of the teaching staff;

(h) subject to the provisions of the policy of the board or the provisions of a collective agreement, as the case may be, in respect of reporting requirements for performance appraisals, report thereon in writing to the board or to the supervisory officer on request and give to each teacher so appraised a copy of the performance appraisal of the teacher;

(i) where the performance appraisals of members of the teaching staff are not required by board policy or under a collective agreement, report to the board or to the supervisory officer in writing on request on the effectiveness of members of the teaching staff and give to a teacher referred to in any such report a copy of the portion of the report that refers to the teacher;

(j) make recommendations to the board with respect to,

(i) the appointment and promotion of teachers, and

(ii) the demotion or dismissal of teachers whose work or attitude is unsatisfactory;

(k) provide for instruction of pupils in the care of the school premises;

(l) inspect the school premises at least weekly and report forthwith to the board,

(i) any repairs to the school that are required, in the opinion of the principal,

(ii) any lack of attention on the part of the building maintenance staff of the school, and

(iii) where a parent of a pupil has been requested to compensate the board for damage to or destruction, loss or misappropriation of school property by the pupil and the parent has not done so, that the parent of the pupil has not compensated the board;

(m) where it is proposed to administer a test of intelligence or personality to a pupil, inform the pupil and the parent of the pupil of the test and obtain the prior written permission for the test from the pupil or from the parent of the pupil, where the pupil is a minor;

(n) report promptly any neglect of duty or infraction of the school rules by a pupil to the parent or guardian of the pupil;

(o) promote and maintain close co-operation with residents, industry, business and other groups and agencies of the community;
(p) provide to the Minister or to a person designated by the Minister any information that may be required concerning the instructional program, operation or administration of the school and inform the appropriate supervisory officer of the request;
(q) assign suitable quarters for pupils to eat lunch.

(4) A principal shall only make a recommendation to the board under subclause (3) (j) (ii) after warning the teacher in writing, giving the teacher assistance and allowing the teacher a reasonable time to improve.

(5) A principal of a school,
(a) in which there is a French-language instructional unit as defined in section 309 of the Act, who does not hold qualifications to teach in the French language as required by subsection 19 (12) or is qualified to teach in such unit only under subsection 19 (13); or
(b) in which there is an English-language instructional unit as mentioned in subsection 325 (1) of the Act, who does not hold qualifications to teach in the English language as required by subsection 19 (11) or is qualified to teach in each unit only under subsection 19 (13), shall notify the appropriate supervisory officer in writing of the impracticability of the duty placed on the principal, having regard to the qualifications of the principal, to supervise the instruction, to conduct performance appraisals and to assist and advise the teachers referred to in the notice.

(6) Where arrangements are made under subsection 26 (3), the principal is relieved from compliance with clauses (3) (a), (g), (h) and (i) to the extent that such duties are performed by another qualified person or persons.

(7) The other qualified person or persons who perform the duties shall be responsible to the board for the performance of such duties.

(8) The outlines of the courses of study mentioned in clause (3) (c) shall be written and provided,
(a) in the French language in the case of courses of study provided in a French-language instructional unit operated under Part XII of the Act; and
(b) in both the English and French languages in the case of a course of study in a program established in the school under paragraph 25 of subsection 8 (1) of the Act.

(9) Where, after reasonable notice by the principal, a pupil who is an adult, or the parent of a pupil who is a minor, fails to pro[illegible]e the supplies required by the pupil for [illegible]ourse of study, the principal shall promptly notify the board.

(10) A principal shall transmit reports and recommendations to the board through the appropriate supervisory officer.

(11) A principal, subject to the approval of the appropriate supervisory officer, may arrange for home instruction to be provided for a pupil where,
(a) medical evidence that the pupil cannot attend school is provided to the principal; and
(b) the principal is satisfied that home instruction is required.

(12) The principal of a school shall provide for the prompt distribution to each member of the school council of any materials received by the principal from the Ministry that are identified by the Ministry as being for distribution to the members of school councils.

(12.1) The principal shall post any materials distributed to members of the school council under subsection (12) in the school in a location that is accessible to parents.

(13) In each school year, the principal of a school shall make the names of the members of the school council known to the parents of the pupils enrolled in the school, by publishing those names in a school newsletter or by such other means as is likely to bring the names to the attention of the parents.

(14) The principal shall meet the requirements of subsection (13) in each school year not later than 30 days following the election of parent members of the school council.

(15) The principal of a school shall promptly provide the names of the members of the school council to a supporter of the board that governs the school or to a parent of a pupil enrolled in the school, on the request of the supporter or the parent.

(16) The principal of a school shall attend every meeting of the school council, unless he or she is unable to do so by reason of illness or other cause beyond his or her control.

(17) The principal of a school shall act as a resource person to the school council and shall assist the council in obtaining information relevant to the functions of the council, including information relating to relevant legislation, regulations and policies.

(18) The principal of a school shall consider each recommendation made to the principal by the school council and shall advise the council of the action taken in response to the recommendation.

(19) In addition to his or her other obligations to solicit the views of the school council under the Act and the regulations, the principal of a school shall solicit the views of the school council with respect to the following matters:

1. The establishment or amendment of school policies and guidelines that relate to pupil achievement or to the accountability of the education system to parents, including,
   i. a local code of conduct established under subsection 303 (1) or (2) of the Act governing the behaviour of all persons in the school, and
   ii. school policies or guidelines related to policies and guidelines established by the board under subsection 302 (5) of the Act respecting appropriate dress for pupils in schools within the board's jurisdiction.
2. The development of implementation plans for new education initiatives that relate to pupil achievement or to the accountability of the education system to parents, including,
   i. implementation plans for a local code of conduct established under subsection 303 (1) or (2) of the Act governing the behaviour of all persons in the school, and
   ii. implementation plans for school policies or guidelines related to policies and guidelines established by the board under subsection 302 (5) of the Act respecting appropriate dress for pupils in schools within the board's jurisdiction.
3. School action plans for improvement, based on the Education Quality and Accountability Office's reports on the results of tests of pupils, and the communication of those plans to the public.

(20) Subsection (19) does not limit the matters on which the principal of a school may solicit the views of the school council.

Vice-Principals

12. (1) A board may appoint one or more vice-principals for a school.

(2) A vice-principal shall perform such duties as are assigned to the vice-principal by the principal.

(3) In the absence of the principal of a school, a vice-principal, where a vice-principal has been appointed for the school, shall be in charge of the school and shall perform the duties of the principal.

Duties of Teachers

20. In addition to the duties assigned to the teacher under the Act and by the board, a teacher shall,

(a) be responsible for effective instruction, training and evaluation of the progress of pupils in the subjects assigned to the teacher and for the management of the class or classes, and report to the principal on the progress of pupils on request;

(b) carry out the supervisory duties and instructional program assigned to the teacher by the principal and supply such information related thereto as the principal may require;

(c) where the board has appointed teachers under section 14 or 17, co-operate fully with such teachers and with the principal in all matters related to the instruction of pupils;

(d) unless otherwise assigned by the principal, be present in the classroom or teaching area and ensure that the classroom or teaching area is ready for the reception of pupils at least fifteen minutes before the commencement of classes in the school in the morning and, where applicable, five minutes before the commencement of classes in the school in the afternoon;

(e) assist the principal in maintaining close co-operation with the community;

(f) prepare for use in the teacher's class or classes such teaching plans and outlines as are required by the principal and the appropriate supervisory officer and submit the plans and outlines to the principal or the appropriate supervisory officer, as the case may be, on request;

(g) ensure that all reasonable safety procedures are carried out in courses and activities for which the teacher is responsible; and

(h) co-operate with the principal and other teachers to establish and maintain consistent disciplinary practices in the school.

Requirements for Pupils

23. (1) A pupil shall,

(a) be diligent in attempting to master such studies as are part of the program in which the pupil is enrolled;

(b) exercise self-discipline;

(c) accept such discipline as would be exercised by a kind, firm and judicious parent;

(d) attend classes punctually and regularly;

(e) be courteous to fellow pupils and obedient and courteous to teachers;

(f) be clean in person and habits;

(g) take such tests and examinations as are required by or under the Act or as may be directed by the Minister; and

(h) show respect for school property.

(2) When a pupil returns to school after an absence, a parent of the pupil, or the pupil where the pupil is an adult, shall give the reason for the absence orally or in writing as the principal requires.

(3) A pupil may be excused by the principal from attendance at school temporarily at any time at the written request of a parent of the pupil or the pupil where the pupil is an adult.

(4) Every pupil is responsible for his or her conduct to the principal of the school that the pupil attends,

(a) on the school premises;
(b) on out-of-school activities that are part of the school program; and
(c) while travelling on a school bus that is owned by a board or on a bus or school bus that is under contract to a board.

Advertisements and Announcements

24. (1) No advertisement or announcement shall be placed in a school or on school property or distributed or announced to the pupils on school property without the consent of the board that operates the school except announcements of school activities.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply to anything posted in the school in accordance with the regulations.

Canvassing and Fund-Raising

25. (1) It is the duty of a pupil to ensure that any canvassing or fund-raising activity on school property by the pupil is carried on only with the consent of the board that operates the school.

(2) No principal, vice-principal or teacher, without the prior approval of the board that operates the school at which they are employed, shall authorize any canvassing or fund-raising activity that involves the participation of one or more pupils attending the school.

Appendix 2: Glossary

advisory body. A group established to provide advice and recommendations. An advisory body does not have final decision-making power.

amendment. A change made to a regulation or a law.

bylaws. The rules adopted by an organization for the regulation of its operation and proceedings. Bylaws must not conflict with the statute or charter by which the organization is created.

constitution. The document that defines the structure of an organization and sets out the principles according to which it is governed.

Education Act. In Ontario, the act that sets out the duties of the various persons or entities responsible for the delivery of education. The Minister of Education is responsible for the administration of the Education Act.

Education Improvement Commission (EIC). An arm's-length agency of the Ontario government that was established under the Fewer School Boards Act, 1997, and that ceased operations, as scheduled, on December 31, 2000. The EIC consisted of six commissioners and a number of staff. Its main responsibility was to oversee the smooth transition to district school boards for the delivery of elementary and secondary education.

Education Quality Improvement Act. An act that came into force in December 1997, amending the Education Act and other statutes to bring about a wide range of education reforms in Ontario. This act required that every publicly funded school in Ontario establish a school council.

exemplars. Samples of student work that illustrate the achievement levels defined in the Ontario curriculum for each of the various subject areas. Exemplar documents are published by the Ministry of Education to provide teachers and parents with samples of student work at each of the four levels of achievement. The documents outline specific criteria and standards for the performance of tasks related to the curriculum expectations, and include teacher's notes and comments that both explain how the students' work meets the criteria and offer suggestions for improvement.

feeder schools. Elementary schools whose graduating students enrol in a particular high school. The feeder-school system helps to stabilize enrolment in particular high schools.

Individual Education Plan (IEP). A written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student. An IEP must identify learning expectations that are modified from or alternative to the expectations given in the curriculum policy document for the appropriate grade and subject or course, and/or any accommodations and special education services needed to assist the student in achieving his or her learning expectations. The IEP is not a daily lesson plan itemizing every detail of the student's education.

Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education (OAPCE). An organization established in 1940 to represent parents of children enrolled in Catholic education in Ontario in its dealings with the provincial government and other organizations involved in education.

Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations (OFHSA). A non-profit organization representing parents from across the province. The aim of OFHSA is to improve the education system through voluntary parental involvement.

Ontario School Boards' Insurance Exchange (OSBIE). A non-profit insurance program owned by and representing 89 per cent of the school boards in Ontario. The primary goals of the OSBIE are to insure member school boards against losses and to promote safe school practices.

Parents Partenaires en Éducation. A provincial association representing parents of children enrolled in French-language schools in its dealings with the provincial government and other organizations involved in education.

policy. A principle, direction, or course of action adopted by a government or other institution. Government policies are customarily implemented through local administrative decisions, within parameters set by government rules and regulations.

policy/program memoranda (PPMs). Official numbered memoranda issued by the Ministry of Education and directed to school boards and schools. These memoranda are statements of ministry policy and may include information about the Education Act and regulations made under the act.

quorum. The minimum number of members of an organization that must be present at a meeting to make the proceedings legitimate and official.

regulation. A rule made and approved under an act of the Legislature. Regulations extend acts: some outline detailed directives, while others serve as vehicles to communicate annually changing provisions.

Robert's Rules of Order. A formal system of meeting procedures designed to assist organizations to operate in a smooth and orderly fashion.

Royal Commission on Learning (1995). Established in 1993 by the Province of Ontario to "ensure that Ontario's youth would be well prepared for the challenges of the twenty-first century". The commission released its four-volume report, *For the Love of Learning,* in 1995. The report, which contained 167 recommendations, established an action plan to guide the reform of elementary and secondary education.

school authority. A school board that often operates a single school in an isolated area or a school in a children's treatment centre or hospital.

school improvement plan. A plan that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of student achievement and specifies how and when such changes will be made.

statute. An act of the Legislature approved by the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council.

superintendent. A supervisory officer appointed by a school board to perform various duties, which may include responsibility for the operation of schools within a specified geographic area under the jurisdiction of the board. A superintendent may address the concerns of parents, students, teachers, and trustees, and may provide support to the administrative staff of each school.

trustee of a school board. A member of the community selected in accordance with the applicable laws and typically elected by popular vote or appointed. Collectively, trustees direct the delivery of education in the schools of their board.

Appendix 3: List of Related Websites

For a more complete listing of education-related websites, follow the links provided on the Ministry of Education website and/or the Ontario Parent Council website.

- Ministry of Education
  www.edu.gov.on.ca
- Ontario Parent Council
  www.ontarioparentcouncil.org
- Statutes and regulations of the Government of Ontario
  www.e-laws.gov.on.ca
- Ontario Regulation 612/00 (School Councils)
  http://192.75.156.68/DBLaws/Regs/English/000612_e.htm
- Ministry of Education: School and Board Finder
  www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/schoolfinder
- Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)
  www.eqao.com
- Ontario School Boards' Insurance Exchange (OSBIE)
  www.osbie.on.ca
- Ontario College of Teachers (OCT)
  www.oct.on.ca

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